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ウメ種
イラスト●柴乃櫂人
神殺しの英雄と七つの誓約
Kamigoroshinoeiyu and Ermenhilde
エルメンヒルデ
OVERLAP

Kamigoroshi no Eiyuu to Nanatsu no Seiyaku

(神殺しの英雄と七つの誓約)

The God Slaying Hero and the Seven Covenants

Umetane

Artist : 柴乃櫂人

Synopsis:

Three years ago, to defeat the Demon God who was trying to destroy this world, thirteen braves are summoned from another world. Each of them had varied ages and gender. Each of them was bestowed with cheat like powers not normal in this world.

- One asked for indomitable will against any adversity.
- One asked for god-like magic power.
- One asked for a power to heal everyone.
- One asked for a power to cook foods that will bring smile to everyone.

And so forth, each of them conveyed their wish and were granted what they asked for so that they could complete their quest. They then departed, on adventure to defeat the demon god. For two years, they journeyed together and survived many hardships in this world, through joy, sadness, and discord; they persevered and in the end brilliantly defeated the demon god, brought peace to this world and then decided to live there. Among those thirteen, is one man that hid his whereabouts and disappeared after defeating the Demon God, but

everyone would say: It is he, the center of the thirteen braves, who is far more heroic than others.

It is he, who valiantly stands on the foremost line, protecting the others behind him.

It is he, the strongest man that killed the demon god.

And it is he, the only one who is blessed and loved the most by the goddess.

Original Story can be found here: Link

Transation source can be found here: Link

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Character

昔の仲間達と、新しい仲間達。
英雄である事の重荷と、英雄である義務。
失ったものを置いて、前に進むしかない現実。
過去と、現在。
その全てが、王都にある。

【精霊神の狼巫】
ムルル

Kamigoroshinoeiyu
and
Ermenhilde

【魔法使い】
井上幸太郎

【賢者】
宇多野優子

「私の右目が、山田蓮司（彼）の死を予言している」
「そう。
……放っておいていいんじゃない？」

キャラクター紹介

【精霊神の狼巫（ろうふ）】ムルル

Mururu

狼の獣人で、身体能力に優れる少女。どこか儚げな第一印象を受けるが、
実はかなりの食いしん坊で、食には煩い。
格闘戦が得意で、魔術を一切使えないが魔力で身体能力を強化している。
戦闘状態になると二の腕まで白い体毛が覆い、爪を任意に伸ばせる。

【賢者】宇多野優子（ウタノユウコ）

女神から授かったチート：
『自分が知るどのような魔法・魔術も使える力』

Utano Yuko

十三人の英雄の一人。魔神討伐後はイムネジア王国の内政官として忙しい日々を送っている。実際は優しく仲間思いだが、言動が冷たく感じられ、誤解される。甘えるのが苦手。

【魔法使い】井上幸太郎（イノウエコウタロウ）

女神から授かったチート：
『未来視の魔眼』『???』

Inoue Kotarou

十三人の英雄の一人。魔神討伐後は世界を旅して回っているが、寂しがり屋なためよく仲間の前に姿を現す。銀髪に右が紅、左が金のオッドアイの中性的な容姿。常にクールで格好良くあろうとするが、相手に強く出られると素の気弱な性格が表に出てしまう。蓮司からは中二病予備軍と呼ばれている。

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Chapter 24 Road to the Kingdom (1)

*

The sun had set, and I was walking through the dark corridor. My whole body ached due to the gruelling work I had gone through during the day.

The cold air struck my skin and gave me goosebumps. It was a stone corridor but a first class carpet was laid on it so my footsteps weren't loud. Groaning from the muscular pains, my footsteps were in disorder.

Shelves decorated with expensive ornaments, pretty flowers, knight armours made of silver, and a small light of magical energy. These things came into my view in the night's darkness.

But all that felt a bit scary which made me walk a bit faster. My quiet footsteps became a bit louder.

My destination was the chapel at the end of this corridor. I didn't really have anything specific to do. It was simply a part of my routine.

In that chapel was the statue of the Goddess. It wasn't real nor did it have the Goddess' soul or anything. Made out of silver, it was simply

nothing more than a statue.

How long did I walk in that dark corridor? But now finally, a giant door was in front of me. I used all my strength to push it open. Because that door was heavier than I expected, by the time I entered the chapel, I was a bit out of breath.

And finally I was inside. In front of me was magnificent stained glass that decorated the windows and the ceiling. The faint light of magical energy shone blue, red, gold, green, purple.....in various colours even though it was night time. It looked so unnaturally beautiful that the silver statue of the Goddess placed at the innermost part of the chapel looked truly divine.

The statue of Goddess Astrarea.

One of the 3 gods that created this world. Ruler of the light and the one that created humans.

In normal temples, people would think that the bigger the statue the better it was but the one here was of the size of a normal human. Maybe that's why it was beautiful, it felt divine.

I tried to close door quietly but the wooden door made a dry sound that resounded inside the chapel.

It's not like it's not allowed to be here late at night but the empty chapel made me feel as if I was doing something bad.

Just like that, as if being pulled, I walked towards the goddess' statue.

Even though I was walking over the carpet my footsteps made sound. Was it simply the air that was cold or was the silver statue giving off the chill I felt? I didn't know but the mental chill I felt made me want to stop in my tracks.

But I didn't.

I felt as if I was being pulled as well. Slightly, though.

As I walked towards the silver goddess I stretched out my hand—but stopped right before touching the statue.

Even though I didn't touch it, I could feel the heat of my fingertip disappear from the coldness of the statue. As if it was frozen, I became unable to move my finger.

Even though it should be impossible. Giving a wry smile, I removed my finger away from the statue. The silent night was so cold that I could even hear the buzzing in my ears. I was alone in this place. I suddenly became afraid realizing that and turned back and walked away from the statue.

But, just before that, I felt I heard someone calling my name. Was it a ghost? I looked around for one. In the first place though, it would be ridiculous for a ghost to appear inside a chapel. Thinking that, I sighed. Suddenly, I felt that my eyes connected with the Goddess' statue.

What did I think at that time.....I remember it clearly even now.

——I want to go home.

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When I woke up, I sighed in relief on seeing the worn out ceiling of my room.

Nostalgic——I couldn't even call it that but it wasn't really a good dream that I had.

It was right about when we were summoned in this world. Somehow realizing the peculiarity of my cheat and understanding that I'd be useless; it was a dream of when I was really dessperate.

Learning the art of combat from the knights, reading books till late night and then prayed to the goddess' statue after getting tired.

That I want to return home.

[What happened?]

"Nothing. Just saw a bad dream."

[.....I see.]

It doesn't ask anything more. From my atmosphere, it must have realized what kind of dream I had. Really, I have a great partner.

Picking up Ermenhilde from below my pillow, I rubbed its rim with my fingers.

"Can I sleep the whole day today?"

[Work. Like a cart-horse.]

".....what a cruel partner you are."

Laughing, I stood up from the bed. Now then, let's work hard today as well.

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When I went to the guild, a scene I wasn't used to was taking place.

As usual , curious gazes from the adventurers were troublesome.

The request put by Souichi and others to take the demon to the capital won't start after a week. Thinking that I'll have to go through this everyday till then, I could only sigh.

From Ermenhilde's point of view, it's a happy thing that I'm the centre of attention but really, I don't want this.

But those gazes were slightly less today. You'd think that they have finally become bored of me but today they were more curious about a very peculiar and rare request client it seems.

At the counter was a white girl.

Her long hair were kept in a ponytail, and her whole body was covered by a white mantle.

Her petite stature showed that she was definitely a girl, her height was

a little higher than my abdomen at most. From behind I couldn't see her expression but I could tell that her appearance must be good considering the amount of gazes fixed on her.

Adventurers——or rather, men were such creatures after all. Even I'd always prefer a cute girl.

And above all, the biggest reason for all the gazes was on her head. Animal ears like that of dog and a fluffy tail that could be seen from the hem of the mantle. Going by her tail, she is not a dog-type beastwoman but a wolf-type.

Beastmen weren't really rare. You'd run into some every now and then inside the town. I don't know why this girl is attracting so much attention but, well, I'm not concerned with it. I went and took a memo from one of the herb gathering request lists.

At that time, I didn't forget to steal a glance of her looks as well. At that, the girl also looked up at me. It was sudden, so even I got slightly surprised.

"Need something?"(girl)

"No, I just found it rare to see a pure white beastwoman, that's all."

"I see. You are a pretty honest human."

She's an indifferent girl. That was my first impression.

Considering she sensed my gaze, she must have sharp senses. It's not rare in beastmen though, so it wasn't really surprising.

I turned towards the receptionist woman to find her making a troubled expression. Her usual smile also felt slightly cramped.

"Did something happen?"(renji)

"Well.....she has come with a request but the details are.."

Is there a problem with the details?

Becoming curious at that, I once again looked to my side.

"What request do you have?"

“To take me to the royal capital.”(girl)

Hearing that, I looked towards the receptionist again at which she shook her sideways.

Well it can’t be helped after all I guess. I also agreed mentally.

“It’ll be difficult so suddenly. No matter how much you hurry, it’ll take at least 7 days to get there.”

And that too by making the horse run as if its life depended on it. Even then, it probably won’t be able to run for days without rest so it would atleast take 10 days.

When I told her that, the receptionist also nodded in agreement.

But the white girl in front of me made a troubled expression.

“Can it not be done faster?”

“Not possible. It would be if there was a better method to travel other than horses but……there are none like that.”(renji)

I remembered the dragon used by the [Monster Tamer] girl. Unfortunately I don’t even know where she is right now.

If it was that dragon, we could reach capital in 2 days. Maybe even earlier. But its useless to tell that to this girl.

“fumu. I see.”

[She has some special circumstances it seems.]

If there weren’t any, she wouldn’t have come to the guild to put a request after all.

Also, don’t sound so happy when someone is in trouble. And, I hate trouble after all. I really want my partner to understand that.

“Are you in trouble?”(renji)

“Yeah, I am. Very much so.”(girl)

Supporting her well shaped chin with her fingers, she went into deep thinking. She must be planning out what to do next from hereon I guess.

The receptionists gaze focused on me. Her expression was pleading me to do something about this girl.

“Are you hungry?”(renji)

“Hm? True, I have eaten only dried meat for the past few days but....”(girl)

“Then about having a meal first. When you’re hungry, your brain won’t work well either right?”

“.....mu. But you know, I’m really in a hurry.”

Saying that she seemed lightly irritated.

It must be an important request seeing she wants to stay at the counter even now. At the same time, she also seemed to be irritated due to hunger as well.

“I doubt it’d be different if you think after taking a meal you know? You won’t get an answer just by staying here.”

“Then, will I get one if I fill my belly?”

“Well, who knows. But, at least your brain would work better than when you’re hungry at least.”

The girl looked down while thinking.

I felt that receptionists gaze was urging me to try even harder.

“I see. You have a point.”(girl)

“It’s good that you understand. Then, there’s a diner nearby where—”

“But, I’m broke.”

I was about to introduce her to a nearby cheap yet pretty good place to eat and be done with it but those words instantly stopped me.

When I looked towards the receptionist, she was also looking at me surprised. It seems she had not yet talked about the reward for the request.

“What were you going to do about the reward for your request?”(renji)

“I’ll pay with my body.”

Do you even understand what you just said?

Inside my view, the receptionist was furiously shaking her head sideways. Well, the guild won’t take part in such services after all.

I sighed while thinking that.

“That won’t work obviously.”(renji)

“Why? I may not look the part but I excel at hunting. I have confidence to not lose to any monster.”

Oh, you meant ‘body’ in that sense!

Once again, this time along with the receptionist, I sighed.

[kukuku, what an interesting beastwoman.]

“Oi, you mimidoshima!” (T/N: mimidoshima is a word used for a woman who has lots of superficial knowledge about sex. I couldn’t think of a an english word suitable for that. Got any ideas? Leave it in the comments.)

[I don’t know what that means but I feel like you just made a fool of me Renji.]

And the receptionist who couldn’t hear Ermenhilde blushed maybe because she thought I said that to her.

Shouldn’t you be angry or refute that normally? To blush like that means she must be not very experienced. How innocent.

“For the time being lets have a meal. I’m tired.”

“But, I don’t have money.”

“I’ll treat you one meal at least. I’m tired, want to take a break.”

[What about work?]

Later.

In this situation, I can’t really abandon this white girl.

“Is it fine?”(girl)

“Yeah. We can think of a solution together while having a meal. We might be able to come up with a good idea.”

“umu. You’re a good man it seems.”

On being told that, I didn’t feel any bad vibes from her.

It will hurt me slightly in the money department but, well, helping people like this may be fine once in a while. Though I wonder whether it can actually be called as helping her.

“It’s my hobby to do one good deed every day.”(renji)

“That’s a very good thing.”(girl)

[This is the first I’m hearing of this.]

Because it’s the first time I said that. If there really was a person who did a good deed everyday, that person would be called a saint.

“What’s wrong?”

While I was talking about that, a voice came from behind.

Turning back, I saw a girl with a somewhat dazed expression and a a handsome elf standing there. It’s Miss Francesca and Faylona(elf). I hadn’t noticed them since I was focused on my conversation.

Maybe because they have good compatibility, they seem to party together a lot. As a party of an handsome guy and a beauty, they do gather attention as well.

“She seems to be in trouble.”(renji)

I pointed to the white girl with my gaze.

“Yeah, I’m very troubled right now.”(girl)

“……is that something to say as if bragging?”

Faylona said that with a somewhat amazed voice.

“I’m not bragging.”

[To me, she simply seems brazen.]

Well, it sure is not something one says while puffing their chests after

all. I agreed with Ermenhilde.

“Anyway, I’m hungry.”(girl)

“I get it I get it. After talking about food, now you’re focused on that?”(renji)

“I’ve been eating nothing more than dried meat and grass for a long time now.”

“Isn’t that amazing. Sounds great for the body.”

When I said that, she puffed her chest proudly for some reason. I’m not complimenting you.

“Why don’t you two also join us? It’s a bit early for lunch though.”

“Well sure. Since you have invited us, I want to come along.”(fran)

Saying that, Miss Francesca looked at Faylona.

“We haven’t even taken a request yet. Do as you wish.”(elf)

“No, I am asking you to come as well.”(renji)

“.....I see.”

Somehow, this guy is stupid in the weirdest of places.

When I looked at him with an amazed gaze, he showed a disappointed expression.

“Well, fine. Then, let’s go to the nearby restaurant.”(renji)

“umu. I leave it to you.”(white girl)

[Is that the attitude of someone being treated to a meal?]

I agreed with Ermenhilde’s words.

Well, her personality isn’t really that troublesome. After we find a solution to her request, we’ll part ways anyway.

I hate trouble after all.

Saying that inside my head one more time, we left the guild. Our destination was 2 blocks away from the guild.

Since its main customers are adventurers, its menu mostly has energy filled dishes and lots of alcohol.

And there are many who drink even though its midday. Maybe because Miss Francesca wasn't used to such places, she seemed to be looking around curiously which looked amusing.

[Don't start drinking, alright?]

I don't have a hobby of drinking during the day. While listening to Ermenhilde, I sat down randomly.

Around the circular table, the white girl sat to my left, Miss Francesca to my right, and Faylona to my front.

Handing the menu to the white girl, I sighed. How did it end up like this. It might be too late for this, but I gave a sigh due to the unexpected expenses.

Just when my wallet had finally gotten a bit thicker. It made me realize that I was really too lax with my money.

"I'll pay for my part."(elf)

"Obviously. I have no intention of paying for men."(renji)

"How harsh."

"Like I care."

[You're just too soft with women.....]

Could you stop talking like I'm some kind of guy who is loose with women?

I still decide whether to treat or not depending on the person.

"Now then,"

I looked towards the white girl who was focused at the menu. Realizing my gaze, she looked towards me.

"What happened? I haven't decided what to order yet."(girl)

"At least tell us your name. I am Renji."

“From there.....? I am Francesca Barton.”

“Faylona.”

“mu. To not have told my name to the one treating me, I have been rude. My name is Mururu.”

“I see.”

[.....It seems like you’re being treated as just a purse Renji.]

Yeah, I’m definitely being treated as just a purse here.

What’s up with this girl really. I could not decide how to interact with this type of a girl.

Would it be okay to get a little angry or should I just let it go? Miss Francesca was also giving me a troubled look and Faylona had a sour face as usual.

“Alright, I’ve decided.”(Mururu)

“She really works at her own pace.....”

Sighing, I told her order to the waiter. But still, its all meat dishes, that too, 2 of them. Can she even eat them both? Frankly, her body is small. When compared with Miss Francesca, her smallness is further emphasized.

“I’m the one paying, don’t you leave any leftovers, alright?”(renji)

“There’s no problem. I can actually eat double that amount.”

A glutton with that small body?!

“Who orders 2 dishes when being treated by another in the first place?”

“I’m really sorry for that. Really, I am but.....frankly, when I thought of a dish other than dried meat, I couldn’t help myself. Really sorry, Renji.”

“.....Dried meat isn’t a ‘dish’ in the first place..”

[Seriously.]

I also nodded.

“Well, don’t mind it. I did say that it was my treat. I won’t break my

promise.”

“You really are a good guy.”(mururu)

“Oh please. I just find everything troublesome.”

[Are you embarrassed?]

I’m not. Hitting Ermenhilde who said a weird thing, I made it shut up.

“Now then, Miss Mururu—-”

“‘Miss” is unnecessary. I may not look like it but I’m a full fledged adult.”

She puffed her chest proudly at that but her body is covered with a mantle so I can’t tell how grown up she actually is.

“Alright, then Mururu, what is your request? While being broke, that is.”(renji)

“Well, there are some deep circumstances behind it.”

“Circumstances?”

“umu. A few days ago, I saved a few adventurers on the highway but later that night, my purse got stolen.”

There’s nothing deep about that, in fact, that’s way too simple to understand.

She got betrayed after helping them. Unable to say anything, we three could only remain silent.

“Well, I wasn’t really mindful about my own money after all.”

“It’s amazing how you were able to travel like that.”

It couldn’t be helped that I sounded almost sarcastic/amazed there.

Money is essential when travelling after all. It’s really weird to hear that you weren’t really mindful of that.

Well, I’m in no position to say that though.

“How cruel....”(fran)

“No, it was my ineptitude that I was unable to see through their true nature. Even though my parents always told me to be always suspicious of others.”

“You, still came along with Renji so easily even now.”(elf)

“.....You’re talking as if I’m some kind of villain, you know.”

“Why don’t you put your hand on your chest and think again?”(elf)

[Well, you hid the fact that you’re a Hero after all.]

Oh that. I’ll say this as many times as you want but I’m not worthy to be called a hero.

I don’t have the honour that Souichi or Aya have. Thinking that, I breathed a sigh. Well, that guy’s not really serious either, he’s grinning after all. Must be enjoying teasing me. What a bad personality.

“Mu.....”

But, when he said that, Mururu’s gaze turned towards me. Her gaze contained a hint of surprise as well.

“Will Renji also deceive me?”

“If I was planning to, I wouldn’t treat you to a meal, neither would I invite these two.”

If I wanted to trick her, I would lie and then lead her to some back alley. Of course, I have no such hobbies though.

“But well, it would be for better if Mururu was a bit more cautious of people.”

“I see. If Renji says that, I will think about it.”

“Why did my name come up there?”

“Because you treated me to a meal. I have been taught to always take the words of my benefactor sincerely and seriously.”

“Well, you’ve been taught well it seems.”

“Umu.”

Oh, we digressed from the topic. I did an *ahem*.

“So, why do you want to go to the Royal Capital so quickly?”

“I have something to deliver to the witch at the Capital.”

“Witch—-The Sage, eh?”

At that, Miss Francesca and Faylona’s gaze landed on me. Mururu made a confused face at that but I simply shrugged my shoulders and turned their gazes aside.

[You won’t come out honest there, which is why you were talked to like that by the Elf.]

“It hurts my ears.”

But still, something for Utano-san eh?

Honestly, I can only have a bad premonition about this. I recalled the black Ogre and Orc I fought.

Why I wonder? It’s just that the moment I heard Utano-san’s name, I could only think of that. I can trust my intuition at such times.

“What is this thing you want to give?”(fran)

“That, I cannot tell. The Spirit God has told me to not show it to anyone except the Witch. I apologise.”

I see, that makes sense. Also, for the Spirit God to have given it, it must be something very important.

Once again, their gazes turned to me but I looked at the ceiling wondering what to do.

[A request from the Spirit God, eh?]

“It’s not a request.”

In the first place, I haven’t decided whether I’d accept this or not.

“That’s why, Renji, is there really any way to get to the capital as soon as possible?”

“I said this before as well but it’d be impossible so suddenly. No matter

how fast you go, it'll take atleast 10 days."

"I see."

Even if you get disappointed like that, even I can't help it.

While we were talking, finally the dishes we ordered arrived.

"For the time being, let's fill up our stomachs. Your head won't work properly empty stomach after all."

"umu, that's true."

But still, an item from the Spirit God.

On hearing the word, Spirit God, I recalled the [Elfreim] continent.

This Imnesia continent where humans live is pretty green but Elfreim is even greener. Compared to how humans live by clearing away nature, the beastmen and demi-humans live together with the nature.

That's why it's the country of the Demi-humans and Beastmen but the rich and impressive beauty of the continent is so great that you cannot forget it once you have seen it.

And the Spirit God is the one worshipped by its people. Such an existence was sending an item to a God SLayer. It's suspicious, or rather, it'll definitely lead to some trouble.

"……waa."

While looking at the white girl stuffing her cheeks full of food energetically, I thought about what to do.

There's also the request with Souichi and others to take that demon to the capital as well but that's 10 days later. It's not much, but this girl probably won't accept it.

Also, riding just horses instead on a carriage should lessen the trip by few days. The problem is that this girl is broke.

I can't exactly say 'alright, farewell.' And just go away now either. Well, I can, but after that I won't be able to sleep properly.

"Um, Mururu-san? You should eat a bit more calmly or its dangerous

you know?"(fran)

"There is no problem."

"I'm the one treating so how about at least tasting the dishes properly before swallowing."(renji)

"Got it."

Seeing the difference in treatment between me and Miss Francesca, we both started laughing. Because she has a small body, she actually feels like some small animal.

"If it's the words of the Spirit God, then I shall help as well."

And, Faylona who had been quiet till now also spoke up.

"Really? I'm in your debt Elf."(mururu)

"It's Faylona, beastwoman."

Are they getting along with each other or not?

And, somehow the talk had advanced. Well, for an Elf, a request from the Spirit God would be very important I guess.

While seeing these 2's exchange, Miss Francesca was giggling while hiding her mouth with her hand.

[But still, do you think they'd leave a request from the Spirit God to just one beastwoman?]

Well, who knows. Did the oracle/divine message include that as well or is there some other hidden reason? Maybe there's someone moving from the shadows as well. It could be that my meeting with this girl was not just some lucky coincidence as well.

Chapter 25 Road to the Kingdom (2)

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In front of me, a white fluffy tail was swaying.

Mururu was sitting on a chair without the cloak she had been wearing so her healthy legs, her butt covered with short-pants like trousers and the tail coming out from it was really tempting to the eyes.

In front of Mururu was the guild's reception counter. She must be worried about whether the request we put up will get accepted or not.

"You should calm down a bit."(renji)

"It's difficult."

[She's like a little kid.]

Really. I agreed with Ermenhilde.

I put up the request in my name but it'll probably be just me, Mururu and Faylona who'd go to the capital. Miss Francesca is a student after all and I can't make a noble's daughter hurry towards the capital anyways.

We were few but since this concerned the Spirit God, we needed to hurry.

At least that's what Faylona decided. Right now, he's out shopping with Miss Francesca to prepare for the journey.

We tried putting up a request at the guild hoping to get a magician to join us but well, I doubt anyone would come forward.

No matter how well spread my name was, there won't be anyone who'd take part in an escort to the capital for almost free. At times like these, practical things like money are more important tha something like the title of a Godslayer or Hero.

There's a limit to how much money both me and Faylona have and also,

even if it was the request of the Spirit God, one wouldn't be ready to spend all his savings for Mururu who was just an acquaintance. Even after this request was completed the fact that Mururu was penniless wouldn't change. Since there was no reward, it'll only create problems for her own livelihood later on.

"I hope we can get some comrades."

"Well, yeah."

Saying that, I flicked Ermenhilde with my finger.

It flew in the air raising a dry sound and when I caught it––it was Tails. I figured as much.

From that sound, Mururu turned towards me. Her wolf ears were twitching which looked really amusing.

"What are you doing?"(mururu)

"Test of luck."

"I see. I hope you get a good result."

And then, she smiled like an innocent child. In a sense different from Ermenhilde, I once again felt that she really was a child. After showing me that smile, she once again turned towards the counter.

Her white tail pushed up her cloak and revealed her beautiful legs hidden beneath it.

Giving a sigh, I turned my gaze towards the memos of the accumulated requests of subjugation quests. I was only looking at them to pass time but I thought maybe I should accept one seeing that my wallet was getting empty. Also, I want to know how skilled Mururu is in battle. For a beastwoman who travelled alone, she should be pretty skilled.

This world is pretty convenient only at such times. You can earn quite a lot just by hunting monsters. A stronger the monster, the bigger the reward as well. And that doesn't take a lot of time either.

"Well, don't have too much expectations though."

“But I want to.”

I guess this is the first time she’s travelling like this. After I treated her to a meal, she has been looking around everywhere curiously. Everything’s new to her here after all. I can tell from observing her.

Beastmen––Werewolves like Mururu, there are others with characteristics of tiger, bear, or rabbit as well. They were not one single species like Humans. They were a community made of a diverse types of species.

The biggest difference between Beastmen and demi humans or humans was that they didn’t utilise money. They depend on bartering instead. That’s why this girl neither panicked nor got angry even after having her money stolen. Even now, she thinks that someone would definitely help her.

This is why even though there is trading between Elves or Dwarves and humans, there’s not much interaction with beastmen. The flow of money was important to the society after all. Profit from every transaction would further enrich the country and that would in turn make the lives of the people better.

True, bartering and trust in your neighbours was also important but that alone won’t develop the society.

That’s why, unlike with the demi-humans, there was not much interaction with Beastmen. The Beastmen really come out of their world, in a way they were self sufficient. There were some who’d come out due to their curiosity towards the outside world or due to some job like Mururu, but they were the minority.

––or that’s how I saw it, to be exact. Well, my opinion has also changed quite a lot in the previous year as well. There were a quite a few Beastmen in the Magic City. I can see them sometimes while walking around the district. Going by the trend, there might be others at the other cities and the capital as well.

I guess the world also changed. While I had retired into the rural countryside.

[How carefree. I'm more worried about what she has to deliver to Yuuko you know.]

Well that's true, I guess.

The relationship between the Goddess and the Spirit God wasn't bad per se, but it wasn't good either.

During our journey, at first they were even hostile.....well not really, but there was discord. There were times we ended up fighting their priests and got injured as well.

For that Spirit God, to have sent something to Utano-san who was an apostle of the Goddess was strange. Well, it must be something troublesome for sure, my instinct told me.

In the first place, this 'request from God' itself sounds suspicious. First we got the 'request' from the Goddess to subjugate the Demon God and had even more unreasonable demands during the journey. For me, it's only normal to get vigilant.

While I was thinking about such old things, the guild's swing door creaked open and Miss Francesca and Faylona came back. The guild became a bit noisy from the appearance of the beautiful combination's entrance.

"Yo, how was it?"(renji)

"For the time being, I asked for food for 10 days. It'll be readied by tomorrow."(elf)

"Then, what remains is transport, eh?"

Food for 10 days. Even if its just Dried Meat or other such preserve able food, it'll be quite heavy. We'll need horses.

In case of horses, though it depends on the quality, we'll need gold coins than copper. (T/N: reminder that in this world Silver>gold>copper) Obviously there are no cars in this world, and the only means of transport is either horses or carriages. Obviously the price gets higher in that case. Not to mention we'll need at least two horses. And going by the rates of

Magic City, my wallet's going to be empty. Faylona's wallet would also have been used up from ordering the food.

Sighing, I stood up. No matter how much I try to save, it soon gets spent somewhere. I felt like crying from that fact.

Then just abandon this, is what Ermenhilde would say but the Witch of the Capital–Utano-san, now that her name has come up, I can't feign ignorance now either. If I had ignored her when I saw the white girl at the counter, I would've been free but now that Utano-san's name has come up, I can't.....that's how bonds work I guess. I end up feeling like I have to do something as well.

Well, Ermenhilde being Ermenhilde, knowing that I won't be able to abandon her anyway but still said that means it really has a bad personality. Remembering her figure from the back standing in front of the counter, I couldn't help it. As an Adult, I couldn't just abandon a child in trouble.

"Sorry but, can I ask you to have the horses readied as well?"

"Yeah, no problem."

Saying that, I stood up at which Mururu's gaze turned towards me.

"Going somewhere?"

"You're coming too. What will Miss Francesca do?"

"Me?"

"We're going to make some earnings. Mururu, let me teach you a bit of how money works."

I said that but she only twisted her head in confusion.

Feeling worried about our future, I could only sigh as I dropped my shoulders.

It would have been fine if she was living in the beast world, but now that she has come here, she'll have to learn how money works if she's going to live with humans.

I don't know how much money was stolen from her but she really must have been easy prey for the robbers.

"By earning, are you going to subjugate monsters?"

"That's right. We don't have much time so we'll just find some easy prey at an easy place."

Saying that, I swayed the memo in my hand.

Monster subjugation. Our opponent will be goblins that can be found nearby. This can also be completed quickly as well. Since we are supposed to leave tomorrow, I don't want to face monsters that would tire us.

Truth be told, I just want to depend on Herb gathering but considering Mururu's personality, that'd be difficult. This girl really hates waiting after all.

"Money?"(mururu)

"Yes, that's right. In the human world, you aren't called an adult until you start earning on your own."(renji)

".....I see.."

"That's painful to my ears."(fran)

[Being half-a-man actually might be better in such a case then.]

Ermenhilde said that but even I think that way. It's weird since I was the one who said that but that's painful to my own ears as well.

Mururu made a surprised expression and Miss Francesca made a sour face.

Mururu's one thing, I think Miss Francesca would be able to earn by herself though. Well, her very first goblin hunt might have become a trauma for her. She almost died after going hunting alone after all, she must have recalled that.

"Leave the horses to me."

"Yeah. For the time being, let's just earn Mururu's lodging fees at least."

Right now, she'd have no choice to either stay with me or spend the

night with the Elves in the forest.

I am one thing, but Elves are usually not very welcome to other races. Faylona could even be called an unusual case. Thinking such things, I gave my wallet to Faylona. Aah I wonder how much will it cost. No matter how much I earned after coming here, I doubt it'd be enough to buy a few horses though.

"C'mon, let's go."

"Un, Got it."

"Yes."

It seems, Miss Francesca is also coming with us.

It'd be easier with a magician so frankly I'm relieved.

[As expected, it's easier living along with people.]

I was slightly surprised from the sudden words.

It's rare for Ermenhilde to say something like that.

[Like this, Renji is going on a monster subjugation quest due to the influence of people.]

"Please stop talking like it's a good thing. I don't like either fighting or monster subjugation."

It's dangerous, it hurts when you get injured and you might even die. And it's the same for my comrades as well.

That's why I want to live carefreely while gathering herbs only. But the world is cruel, before I realized I was going on another monster subjugation quest.

Hunting the black Orc with Miss Francesca, and that black Ogre and the army goblins. And that Demon as well. I am working a bit too much recently. Just when I thought I could finally relax, this time I have to escort this white girl to the capital. Because the witch of the capital—Utano-san is involved, I'll feel bad to abandon her.

"What happened suddenly?"

“My chatty friend said something strange.”

When I answered that Mururu who came up to me and asked what happened, she made a puzzled face and looked up at me.

Well, it’s a normal reaction considering she can’t hear Ermenhilde. Maybe because Miss Francesca remembered how she was the same back then, she started laughing.

“Renji, you’re strange.”

“I’m told that a lot.”

[.....and everytime you’re told that, I wonder, is it really fine like that?]

Well not really but it’s better than being relied on as Hero.

Even if you expect something Heroic from me, I have very few things I can do. I can only fight. That too, only a bit stronger than normal adventurers.

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Along with Miss Francesca and Mururu, I left the district. There’s not even a need to look for goblins. They’ll appear themselves as long as you go a bit away from the highway and into the grasslands.

Normally, that is. Today, it was a bit different. The existence of Mururu lessened the difficulty of the goblin hunting quest.

“There. Found them.”

“Amazing, Mururu-chan.”

“.....this much, even children at the village can do.”

She said that but she must be happy to have been complimented since her tail was swaying energetically underneath her cloak.

On looking to where Mururu told, I could confirm 3 goblins with my

sight. Mururu was finding them so easily because of her sense of smell. It could be said as one of the special abilities of Beastmen.

Beastmen's physical abilities exceed us humans or demi-human's abilities by a huge gap. It's the same with the sharpness of the 5 senses as well. Their arm strength, leg strength etc are also in a different level. And they're like that from when they're children as well. An adult beastman is in a totally different level. On the other hand, they cannot use any kind of magic at all. It's not like they don't have magical energy, yet they can't even use spirit magic. One theory suggests that they're using all of their magical energy in enhancing their physical abilities which is why they are so physically strong.

While crouching and hiding among the waist-tall grass, I was astonished at their physical skills.

"Even though you have a small body, you really are full-fledged beastwoman."(renji)

"I have even completed the ceremony for becoming an adult after all."

Saying that, she puffed her chest somewhat proudly. It was so childish it felt really cute. Why do feel so happy seeing her I wonder.

Unlike Demi-humans, beastmen have a life span similar to humans. Going by her looks, she should be about 14 yrs old. Now that I think about it, Souichi and others were also around this age when we were summoned.

"Mururu-chan is treated as an adult among Beastmen already?"(fran)

"That's right. The ceremony of adulthood for beastmen is not conducted by age but by physical strength. Winning against specific monsters, gathering materials, by doing such things you have to gain the approval from your comrades to be accepted as an adult."

The ceremony of adulthood. It's not age based like with humans. It differs with each race but mainly it involves defeating monsters alone. Those not suited to fighting are supposed to gather some specific material instead. The monster involved in such subjugation is usually

either goblins or Orcs so Mururu should be used to fighting alone against monsters of that level.

As I explained that, both looked at me surprised.

“You know a lot.”

“I have also gone through that ceremony. Well in our case it was not to be acknowledged as an Adult but to be acknowledged as a comrade instead though.”

It should actually be said that we got dragged into doing it to be exact.

On the Elfreim continent, to gain their trust we were asked to hunt the monster that was said to be the master of one part of the forest. As expected, I didn’t do it alone but with Souichi and others.

Later on we were told that normally you don’t face such boss-class monster but have to fight mere goblins usually. Basically, rather than ceremony, we were simply used to get rid of their troubles.

“Is that so?”

“I may not look like it but I have lived a HARD.....hard life after all.”(T/N the caps are because Renji says it in English at first then realises that they won’t get it so switches to jap.)

[Seriously.....]

For some reason, Ermenhilde made a tired sigh. Well, I really am spending a hard life. From a normal salaryman to saving the world.

If I kept on thinking in that direction I’d get depressed again so I gave a sigh and looked towards the goblins who had yet to sense us.

“Will you be fine with Goblins?”(renji)

“Yeah, no problem. I can take even more.....even 5 of them pretty easily.”(mururu)

“That’s reassuring.”

She must have realized what I meant to say since her atmosphere changed.

Her small body wrapped in the cloak felt like it became bigger. Her careless, gentle looking eyes suddenly turned dangerous and shined. Her legs got covered with white fur completely. Probably, her arms beneath the cloak are the same.

Battle stance. I looked towards the goblin again, it seems they have still not noticed us but are looking around probably due to sensing a strong presence in the surroundings.

Miss Francesca was also surprised from the sudden change in Mururu. I wonder if they teach the ecology of beastmen in Magic Academies? Even if they do, there still won't be any magician who won't get interested in seeing this first hand.

"Can I hunt them now?"(mururu)

"That's the job."

"Got it."

Answering lightly like that, she ran at an incredible speed towards the goblins.

[Will she be fine?]

Well, who knows. I took this request to check that as well. We will travel together from hereon after all, I need to know how well can she fight, what things she can do.

After seeing her enjoying back off, I tuned towards Miss Francesca next.

"Was it your first time seeing a Beastwoman?"

"Ye,s.....at first I thought they won't be much different from humans."

"They only look similar. Except for the ears and tail that is."

But when they enter a battle, they completely change.

From faraway, I heard a *gii* screaming sound.

When I turned to look there, Mururu had already taken down one of the goblins. That said, I can't really confirm. I could only tell that because the 3 goblins I could see from this faraway had lessened to two.

Then, the white shadow that Mururu jumped to an incredible height and lunged at the next goblin.

The last one disappeared into the grass just like that. It was probably pulled and knocked down by the beast called Mururu. That fighting style was truly befitting a beast.

I breathed a sigh at the sudden turn of events and Miss Francesca seemed to be at a loss for words.

“Amazing.”

I could only say that.

Frankly, she might be stronger than me at such a young age. I felt like I’d lose confidence again.

Whether it be Souichi and group or her, why are the children around me so strong? Do I even have any position/status here?

“She’s amazing.”(fran)

“Yeah.”

Saying that, I walked out of the grass I was hiding in.

Mururu was waiting there, untainted with any blood, for us to get there. Even though she’s a close combat fighter like me, how good is she to avoid getting any blood on her, this white girl?

The dangerous glint in her eyes was gone showing that she had calmed down now. But underneath the fluttering cloak, her arms were not thin ones like a normal girl but were covered with pure white fur till her elbows. And even more unusual were the 4 knife like long claws growing from her hands. Right now only her right hand had undergone the transformation but normally both of her hands should be like that.

That appearance was definitely not of a human. It proved that this girl belonged to a completely different species, the Beastmen.

Miss Francesca beside me gulped but as someone even slightly used to seeing beastmen, they’d find this pure fight girl to be extremely beautiful instead.

A sublime, noble beauty that humans can never possess. Coupled with the strength she showed just now, it made her look extremely charming.

“All that’s left is..”(renji)

Hiding my emotions, I drew my knife from its sheath. Opening the mouth of the goblin that Mururu defeated, I cut off one of its fangs with my knife.

“If you take this back to the guild’s reception, you’ll get a reward in return.”

“That’s Renji’s job?”

“Not just me, but of every adventurers’.”

As I gave a l8ight explanation, I began taking off the equipment from the goblins. It’s my usual job after every fight. Though it was Mururu who actually defeated these ones.

[.....Could you not act like a bandit at least this time?]

“Also, you can sell of such equipment for money as well.”

[Oi Renji? It’s your first time fighting with this beastwoman. At least try acting like a Hero for once please?]

While ignoring Ermenhilde who kept saying such things, I took off the equipment from the goblins.

If only acting like a Hero would fill my wallet as well I wouldn’t have minded it. But it doesn’t and what’s more important right now is money rather than the honour of a hero. You can’t eat with just honour after all.....If I said something like “I’m a Hero.” Then I might get a meal in villages maybe but that in itself is ridiculous to do as a human.

Anyway, it’s a pity that the only useable weapon here is a short sword. That too has a chip in its blade. I doubt we’ll get much from selling this. I could only sigh.

“I see.”(mururu)

“I don’t think many adventurers do all that though.....”(fran)

“When you don’t have money, this is a major source of income.”

[How deplorable.....]

Thereafter, we had Mururu search for Goblins and me and Miss Francesca also joined the fighting.

That said, it was difficult for us to keep up with Mururu’s speed. She’s fast and strong. It was easier to move seperately from her rather than matching along with her. Frankly speaking, the difference in physical ability is a bit too much.

It once again made me realize the difference between humans and Beastmen. Probably, not even Faylona would be able to keep up with her.

“We fought quite a lot but.....are you fine?”(fran)

“Yeah, I’m almost at my limit.”(renji)

2 long swords on my waist, 1 short sword on the other side of the waist. An iron shield on my left hand, and 2 battleaxes on my back. The total weight was probably a bit more than 40kgs. Rather than saying heavy, it was difficult to even move my body. My body is well trained from the constant travelling but this is still taking away most of my stamina. If I did not have the Cheat given to me, I probably wouldn’t have been able to even move.

My breathing has become rough but I can go on a bit more. I really want to return quickly. How the hell do fantasy protagonists walk around so easily with much more stuff in their bags? If I had wished the goddess that I wanted to become like the protagonist of a fantasy story, I wonder how I would have become?

While thinking of that, I distracted my mind from the strain.

[You’re just too greedy.]

“This much should fill up our wallets pretty well.”

“Rather than such things, my claws cut better. How is that even useful, that blunt thing?”

Mururu who said that was also holding a boorish club and a sword, that

didn't suit her small body, in her hands as well.

It's lesser than what I have but still she doesn't even seem to feel a little weight from that. I felt like making her carry half of what I had but quickly threw away that thought. That would be low of me both as an adult and as a man.

"Earning money means you have to collect such things that can be sold."

".....I really can't understand humans."

"I don't think that's exactly correct though."(fran)

[You're definitely wrong here, Renji.]

Oh shut up. We have to leave tomorrow so we have to earn as much as possible by today.

We have acquired provisions, and we should get horses as well. But there are many other things like herbs and medicines needed in a journey. There's no such thing as having too much money.

Normally, I wouldn't work this hard but since we have strict schedule I want to be ready for any unforeseen circumstances. Not to mention that 9i have been getting involved into too many troublesome things these days.

Thinking all that.....I feel tired again. I wonder if I'll be able to even move tomorrow.

After returning to the Magic City, I first went straight to the item shop to sell off the equipment gotten from goblins. When I put down all the equipment on his counter, the shopkeeper shouted in surprise. Well it can't be helped, after all normally an adventurer doesn't come up with so much equipment to sell after going to just one hunt.

Though it earns you money, it's also bulky and difficult to carry back to the city. It also becomes a hindrance while fighting and if you drop it just to fight then collecting it all back is a pain on its own. And, most of the equipment can't be used readily since monster don't maintain their

weapons. That's why people prefer hunting more monsters instead of gathering items from every monster. Most adventurers find the former to be more efficient after all.

After that, I submitted the goblin fangs at the guild and took our reward. As expected, with three of us, we had hunted quite a lot of them so the sum was pretty good. The expenses for the travel were still bigger though.

"Oh right, Mururu, where have you been sleeping till now?"

"Outdoors."

I should have known. Miss Francesca was really surprised but I wasn't that much since I expected this answer.

She was broke and has no idea how money works. Not to mention beastmen are natural hunters that live in the wild. They really have no problem with sleeping outdoors.

"Here."

Saying that, I handed Mururu with some of the money we earned in a pouch.

I handed one to Miss Francesca as well. She refused at first but when I said that it was fine, she accepted it. Well, she helped us so its only normal though.

"This is?"(mururu)

"Reward from the request. This is the money you have earned after today's work."

She looked at the pouch with a curious gaze and checked its weight and whatnot.

It looked so amusing that even while knowing it was rude of me, I ended up laughing.

"So, you can eat things other than dried meat with this as well."(renji)

"I see. Earning like this and then use it for food, is it?"(mururu)

“No, money is used not just for food but……”

If I start explaining about ‘shopping’ to her now, I’ll really get tired.

Hunting goblins, gathering equipment, selling it at the city……..honestly, I’m really tired already. I want to go back to my inn and just sleep.

Sitting on a wooden stool at the guild, I breathed a sigh. Aah, I’m really tired.

[You just find explaining a pain don’t you?]

“Let’s meet up with Faylona and decide when to meet tomorrow already. I’m soo tired.”

“…..Mouu.”(fran)

Saying that, Miss Francesca began explaining various uses of money to Mururu.

Well, whatever. Leaving that aside, I began thinking of other things. I wonder what Faylona is doing right now. He’s taking too much time to buy just horses. Did he also go on hunting alone maybe?

[Fuu, we sure worked a lot today.]

“You did absolutely nothing though?”

Taking Ermenhilde out of my pocket, I flicked it.

“Hmm.”

It was Heads.

“It’d be nice if something good happens.”

While looking at the counter, I muttered so. But I think it’d be difficult.

Probably, we won’t be able to hire a magician. There are many better requests than the one I put up. A normal magician wouldn’t accept mine.

That’s why I decided not to think of such depressing things.

But next, I thought of our journey. We’ll be moving with horses but frankly speaking, riding on horses is really painful. Even after I’ve gotten used to it, it’s physically taxing to travel long distances on horses.

Basically, your butt, or rather, your whole lower body starts hurting. And if you push it, your whole body starts hurting as well.

Thinking about it, I ended up sighing again.

Beside me, the former newbie Miss Francesca was teaching the newbie adventurer Mururu about the uses of money. That scene looked so pleasant, it healed me.

“It’s peaceful.”

[You were fighting goblins only a few hours ago though.]

.....My partner really lacks dreams.

Interlude 4 The Sage's Part/Act

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Looking over the documents handed to me this morning, an confirming that there were no problems with it, I signed them to begin my today's work. If there were any unclear points, I would call the person in charge and ask for an explanation. After the Demon God's subjugation had been completed, I, Utano Yuuko took a job in Imnesia continent that made me a superior to others. Even I myself think that it really doesn't suit me though.

Recently, I have been spending everyday like this. While rubbing my eyes, I breathed a sigh. When was the last time I left the castle town even?

No, when was the last time that I simply relaxed all day as well? Thinking that, I looked up to the ceiling wondering what the hell was I doing with my life.

Even though I am praised as a Sage, a Hero and whatnot, inside I'm still a normal human.

I get tired when I use my brains too much, and I get irritated if I don't get to move my body much. But now that the Demon God had been killed, what was necessary was not brawn but brains. And ability to guide the people.

Unfortunately, I was given the job to deal with domestic affairs, or rather, to give others various jobs. One year after the subjugation of the Demon God, I was appointed as the Municipal Head of this country—the Imnesia Kingdom. Rather than saying that I had talent for this, this worlds domestic and diplomatic policy levels were so much lower than

modern society that my ideas seemed extremely novel and revolutionary to them.. Being continuously threatened by the Demon God, only their military and war related skills developed. There was no kind of activities made for pleasure or fun, and most of the land was in control of nobles and not put under the management of a farmer who could work on it.

Production and manufacturing is mainly related to weapons and armours. Other things like stylish clothing or ornaments were made only for the noble brag about them. Though the price of such articles was one of the reasons why they were not popular with commoners but above all, they simply did not have the time to waste on such things.

The threat of monsters was still there, even the demons were still alive. Though the people were given a temporary sense of freedom with the subjugation of the Demon God, it's not like their lives completely changed. There were too many people who had lost their families and place to work due top monster attacks.

Though I have knowledge, I don't have the experience to manage such jobs properly. Even if I want to open up a orphanage, I don't know what things are necessary. Thanks to all that, I am spending everyday where my head hurts constantly. I am clearly not suited for this. Shouldn't these guys pick a better experienced person for this? Well, at least they help me when I ask for advice in such matters.

Recently, I do feel that I've gotten a bit used to this job as well but still I have a long way to go.

There are a lot of things to do at the royal capital. Maintenance of the highways, repairs of the city walls etc. We still have to shift homeless to permanent houses, distribute provisions to orphans and also collect reasonable taxes from the surrounding villages as well.

Right now there is one in the capital only but sooner or later I want to set up orphanages in the villages as well. Not just farmlands, I want to create mills and factories as well. There's a huge availability of land and personnel so I have to try that.

Today as well, I'll have to face off the huge amount of documents.

Thinking that I felt like crying a bit.

"I should have also left on a journey like a certain someone....."

I muttered but there was no response to that.

The office I have been provided with is huge but I'm the only one here. My thoughts were too unique for the people of this world so there's no one who could converse with me.

No, I don't lack communication skills, the people of this world are simply that thickheaded. Thanks to that, not a single man tries to even flirt with me. They simply don't have a good discerning eye in my opinion though.

A few bookshelves and a work table. A sofa and table for visitors. In the simple kitchen, only a teapot with tea leaves had been prepared. Maids would keep the room clean but documents scattered around the table were a bit too much. It's not like I'm bad at keeping things tidy but when you have to deal with so many documents everyday, it becomes like this normally. I'll say this again but I'm definitely not bad at keeping things tidy alright?.....I'm not good at it either though.

snap As I snapped my fingers, a book flew out from one of the bookshelves and floated down into my arms. It was the magic [Float]. My cheat is [to be able to use any magic from any manga, anime, novel or games]. It's super convenient but because it is so convenient I feel like I'm not getting enough physical exercise nowadays. Insufficient exercise is the arch enemy for a woman. Especially for your weight and body figure.

Thinking like that, I decided to change my thoughts so I opened the book. I'll lose if I let that get to me. I think I should start exercising a bit from tomorrow.

"Let's see....."

Even this country has things like Department of Finance and Department of Infrastructure so as long as I sign the document, I can leave the rest to the specific specialised department.

It's not like I could do everything alone anyway. I'm already at my limit in the first place, if I were made to lead all the departments alone, I'd probably break completely. Mentally.

"Hmm?"

When I was about to begin reading, I felt a disturbance in the magic of the room.

It was simply a matter of my senses, it's not like an incident occurred or anything. It's just that normally magicians of this world use magical energy existing inside their bodies but me and one other magician use the magical energy brought forth from the world itself.

This feeling was a signal that the other magician like me was affecting this room.

"Do you need something, Koutarou-kun?"

For a few seconds, nothing happened. But the disturbance in magical energy kept on growing.

I guess he's coming here using [teleport] but I wonder what happened. He is one of the 13 GodSlayers like me, Inoue Koutarou aka [Demonic Eye Holder] [The Wizard].

After some time, in the empty space, a human figure appeared and soon took full shape.

".....What's with that getup?"(yuuko)

"Fu—-with this, nobody would recognise me right?"(koutarou)

"You're just wearing a ragged robe all over your body."

"To think that you wouldn't understand the merits of this....."

I could only sigh in amazement.

While saying that, the one who appeared was man dressed in ragged clothes. Well, true in that kind of getup one wouldn't be able to tell whether he's a man or woman as long as he doesn't talk. In fact, Koutarou-kun does have a thin figure for a man so one might think of

him as tall lady?.....maybe not.

He was covered in a ragged robe from head to toe and only his lip portion was visible. You'll make the room more dusty so really stop.

Or rather, how should I say this.....he looks so shabby. It's not like he is lacking money either.

I really can't understand this child's clothing sense. Even when we travelling, he'd pick clothes that showed his skin. That led to him getting insect bites, and getting cut from the branches of trees as well. I really hope he'd take more care of himself.

"So why are you in that ragged getup again? Trying to act like a suspicious person?(yuuko)

"What the heck.....Didn't I just say? In this getup, nobody would recognise who I was so its easier to move around!"

It's amazing he didn't get arrested like that. What are the royal guards doing? I thought about about reducing their salaries inside my head. Well, even if they did try to catch him, he'd just [Teleport] away anyway. Even like this he's still one of the Heroes after all. Even his physical abilities are above those of other people in this world.

"So what did you come here for? Sorry but I'm really busy right now so I can't play along with you.....Are you here to help Yuuta-kun maybe?"(yuuko)

Kuuki Yuuta-kun was a knight of this country and also one of the 13 Heroes. He was the vice commander of the Knight Order famous as the [The Shield Knight]. It's been only one year since he entered the order but due to his achievement as one who had saved the world, he was promoted to the position of vice commander in half a year. He's working hard everyday even now it seems.

Also, in terms of ability he even surpasses the strongest knight of this country, O'brien, so he'd probably become the commander soon or later.

Right now he's acting as the aide to the commander and also learning the various jobs of the commander at the same time. It'll be weird if he

was suddenly made the commander and asked to lead the whole knight order, so this is for the best. Yuuta-kun isn't hated by anyone in his surroundings so he seems to be spending everyday happily. I'm jealous. I also want to work my body a little.

"If you're here for money, they'll give you salary as well you know?"(yuuko)

"I'll pass. I'm not that free. And neither am I short on money."

Then why the hell are you in those worn out clothes? If you just wanted to hide your identity, just dress in full black like assassins in games.

"If you're not here to pass time, quickly tell me why you came? I'm really busy you know."

Saying that, I swung the documents in front of Koutarou-kun. Lots of paperwork unrelated to any domestic affairs was waiting for me.

"……You really lack fun in your life. You should enjoy conversing like this more."

"Like I said, I'm not free. Do you just want someone to talk to?"

"No. I'm here to borrow your knowledge."

"Mine?"

Did some kind of trouble occur? When I looked at him questioningly, he removed his robe.

What appeared was silver hair and heterochromatic eyes, one gold and one red. It's a result of asking the goddess to change his appearance as soon as he came to this world. An androgynous face and physique, silver hair, a red right eye and a golden left eye. He really looked like someone from a fantasy world. Or rather, even in this world, he was the only one with this kind of appearance.

"My Demonic Eye showed Renji-dono's future, it seems he will face danger……."(koutaoru)

"It's not the first time Yamada-kun will get into danger."

I cut off his words instantly.

Also, how should I say this but, Koutarou-kun's [Demonic Eye of Future Sight] had a varied accuracy. No, I guess I should say that there is no one specific future. This is nothing but knowledge from my original world but the future was like the various branches of a tree. There was not one but infinte futures that could take place.

Especially, among us——[The Brave] Souichi-kun, the [Demonic Sword User] Hisaki Masaki-chan and Yamada-kun whose powers are a bit set apart from the norm, prediction of these people's future is mostly incorrect.

Even if you say that Yamada-kun is in danger, I guess he must be getting involved into another troublesome case, that's all I feel. In fact, he's been like that from the very beginning. Even when someone predicts his life will be in danger, he would always come out alive. Even if the opponent was a high level Demon, or the Demon Lord, or the Demon God. He would struggle endlessly, get back up desperately, and do all he could to hide his fear.

But well.....

"So, what about Yamada-kun? Is it related to this request from the Spirit God you told me about a little back?"

"Umu. They'll probably leave the Magic City tomorrow but they'll face a Demon god's descandant during their travels."

"Again? He fought one with Souichi and others as well right? And he fought one at a rural village as well it seems."

Saying that, I picked the mithril sword kept near my table. The purple amethyst at the end of the handle was a proof that it was Yamada-kun's sword.

And Yamada-kun had sold this sword to a weapon shop in some village. Before the king or the knight order could find it, I bought it back with my pocket money. I'll charge him for that money, definitely. It seems he's poor, so I'll just make him work somewhere.

It'll be punishment for pushing such a troublesome job on me, leaving the kids alone and going around saving random people in the countryside. Saving even strangers is one his virtues but that doesn't mean he can neglect us. I'm not going to forgive him so easily.

When I started thinking like that, rather than my work load, my irritation towards Yamada-kun became bigger. In the first place, that man is too selfish. Even though he has a position like an elder brother, a father and a guardian to others.....he'd always get himself injured by rushing to the frontlines. It's good that he wants to protect the kids but how much does he want to make us worry for him? He's the model for a useless adult. But even then, it can't be helped that we all trust him and found that part of him to be very attractive. His hard working nature is really great.....I feel like I lost somehow so I should change my thoughts.

Even though he's the weakest, he doesn't accept that he's also the most unique among us.

Among us 13, he was the only one who made the correct choice, he uses that power not for himself but for others. As a result, he alone bears the grudge and hatred of all the Demons for the sin of killing the Demon God. Even though we are celebrated as GodSlayers and as heroes, the demons only hate Yamada-kun who killed the Demon God and not all of us 13.

How many women have cried for that man. That fact that I'm also one of them is really not funny. What kind of man makes a woman cry and then leaves her as well? That too for a whole year?

Soon he'll be coming to the Royal Capital for the Spirit God's request, or rather as escort for the Beastman who took that request. I hope you're ready Yamada Renji, I'll catch you and work you to your bones for this.

The martial arts tournament was also coming close. That will be the first place to start.

While I was deciding all that, Koutarou-kun taken a few steps backwards.

"What is it?"(yuuko)

“No, nothing at all ma’am.”

Why so formal suddenly? This kid’s speaking patterns change like that suddenly, its really amusing.

Putting the Mithril sword back on the table, I breathed a sigh.

“So, what was that about Yamada-kun?”

“Ahem.....While heading to the capital, he’ll be attacked by a descendant of Demon God.”

“Oh right, that.”

I’m not really worried about Yamada-kun being in danger.

“If its Yamada-kun he’ll probably make it through but are you really that worried?”(yuuko)

“My right eye, well, it predicted his death.”

“.....I see.”

Death. That isn’t gentle at all.

But I can’t move away from here either. There are things only I can do here. And I’m not going to be the one to go and meet him even though he was the one who neglected me for so long. Though the latter part is the main reason, but the former is important as well.

“Just leave him alone.”(yuuko)

“How heartless. As expected of the great Witch.”

“I’ll slap you.”

“I’m very sorry.”

When I said that with a smile, he apologised instantly. Good, I like honest children.

Seeing Koutarou-kun and his unstable character, I felt relaxed. Who’s a witch? I even think that I’m more suited to be called the Saint than Yayoi-chan.....No, that’ll be painful in its own way.

“Well if its Yamada-kun, he should be fine right?”(yuuko)

“.....Really?”

“How many times has it been that your right eye has foreseen Yamada-kun’s death?”

When I asked that, his gaze turned blank and he started counting on his fingers.

First he went through all five fingers in his right hand then all five of his left as well.....

“I have no idea how many times it has been.”(kou)

“Exactly.”

He was more unique than Souichi-kun, who is the [Brave] and the [swordswoman] Masaki-chan who wished to have the power to even cut through fate itself, there was no such thing as a definite future.

The power to not lose against anyone. The power to cut through fate itself. Both were incredibly powerful abilities. Depending on how its used, they could rival even the Demon lord in pure strength. But the power of will may allow you to cross your own limits but you cannot cross the limits of a human, or so I think. Compared to that, what Yamada-kun wished for was for a weapon to kill Gods. The power to kill Gods. It was Aya-chan who asked for power rivalling that of Gods that stand above all life, but it was only in terms of magical energy. It was only Yamada-kun who asked the power to surpass even Gods. Its meaning, its result, we saw it one year ago. That’s why we/I can trust him.

“He’ll reach the capital safe and sound. Definitely.”

“That’d be great but.”

“Just trust him. He’s our leader after all.”

The person himself would definitely deny that though, he didn’t wish for that either.

.....but the man called Yamada Renji was definitely our leader. That won’t change even now. Even after he disappeared, he will always be our leader.....for he is the strongest among us all.

It's not like he had some kind of charisma, it's not like he always made the right decisions. We failed together so many times. We the wrong choice so many times. But even then the only reason we didn't break was because he stood in front of us, for he would lead the children with him always. With Ermenhilde in his hands, even though he could fight at full strength only against the Demon God, still he would stand in front of us.

And all the Heroes would chase after his back. He gave us a sense of relief. Maybe that was what he wished for as well. Maybe that was the ideal he had in his mind as well. As an adult, as the oldest, a life which he could be proud of. He always said that.

"He's the Hero Protagonist of the story. He won't die."

"I'm jealous of Yuuko-dono who has so much faith in him. It'd be nice if I could also be like him as well."

Everyone says that. I guess all men wish to become the center of their party, eh?

From Yamada-kun's perspective that position seems to be the hardest, most painful and heavy though. I could only smile wryly at that.

"Then work harder. 'Hero' is a verb. Not a title——if you want to become the protagonist, you can only continue to act like a hero."(yuuko)

"Umu."

"Also——Astrarea is always watching over Yamada-kun, he'll be fine."

".....Yeah, that's right."

I recalled that overprotective, ill-natured Goddess.

I don't know which heartstrings of hers were pulled but that Goddess has affection for Yamada-kun. A goddess who loves a God slayer.

"But still, my eye shows Renji-dono's death.."

When he said till that, I snapped my fingers.

The next moment, Koutarou-kun disappeared from my sights. Activating [Teleport] magic, I made him fly away. His destination was the

centre of the Spirit forest in Elfreim continent. By the side of the World Tree. There might be a be few miscalculations but he won't be far away from there. Probably.

Yamada-kun's death he says, death. If you're that worried, lend him a hand even if its just from the sidelines. With koutarou-kun's abilities, he should be able to lend a hand without making others realize his presence. And also to return from the Elfreim continent.

"Seriously. I'm really busy you know."

Opening the book in my hand, I turned the page.

Construction of the orphanage, providing jobs to vagrants, restoration of the capital, monster subjugation, diplomacy with Elfreim——-and many other things are left for me to do.

I don't need a over talkative Wizard with me but it'd be great if I can get some actual help.

Hurry up and come to the Capital Yamada-kun. I'm waiting for you with lots of work.

Chapter 26 Road to the Capital (3)

*

While attaching our luggage to the Horses' saddle, I yawned when my eyes met Miss Francesca's. Feeling embarrassed, I tried to hide it by concentrating on arranging our luggage.

Early mornings during the fall season were chilly and the sky was still dim and gloomy.

"Renji-san, do you need help somewhere?"

While I was preparing near the city gate, the girl behind me asked me that.

"No, I'm fine. Or rather, me and Feirona are enough for the preparations so you can rest some more, you know?" (T/N: Faylona = Feirona now as per the official english in the illustrations.)

"No……I'm fine. Even I have gotten somewhat used to travelling now."

"Well, I know that."

While answering her, I wondered why did it end up like this for nth time. Even though I actually know the reason as well.

I looked at the girl behind me who was crouching and packing things in a bag right now; Fuyou Aya. One of the 13 Heroes, the genius known as the [Grand Magus].

……Why did she accept such a request which has basically zero reward?

Well, I can somehow guess the reason but I'm not really sure. That's why I end up hesitating to ask her directly as well. Because I know Aya herself would be troubled on how to answer that if I asked her something like that. What does the girl Fuyou Aya expect from the man called Yamada Renji? Neither I nor Aya herself have yet to settle on an answer

to that.

It's weird that we're still travelling together even though its like that. I did try to persuade her otherwise as well. There would be no reward, she'd miss her classes as well and there's even the job of transporting that Demon to the capital 1 week later. I don't think she'd have the time to stick with us, but...

"Still, you're ready to come with us?"(renji)

"Yes."

It was an instant answer. I could only sigh. It'd be useless to say anything more so I gave up. I already tried enough. She won't listen to me even if I asked her not to now anyway. Not to mention, I'd make her mood worse as well. If that happened, worse case, I'd end up in a hole in the middle of the city.....I believe she wouldn't do that to me but since there have been past cases of multiple men who have suffered that so I can't be certain.

I felt like Ermenhilde was laughing inside my pocket. Must be my imagination.

"After all, you took a request with Souichi and Yayoi but.....It's not fair.(aya)

"Even if you tell me that.."

They were there so it had ended up like that. It's not like I was biased in any way, and if the chance had appeared I would have done a quest with Aya as well. Well, it's true that I didn't invite her though. Her pouting appearance looked really cute but if I knew things would end up like this, I would have invited her back then.

Well, even in that case, she would have probably joined us with a different excuse. It's a fact though that her coming with us will be a really great help to be honest. Leaving mine and Aya's circumstances aside, her ability is the real thing. Much greater than me or Miss Francesca. You could say that she was in a different level.

[At times like these, you should just be honest you know?]

“The fact that I can’t is one of the pains that come with being an adult.”

“What the heck does that even mean?”(aya)

Saying that, Aya giggled.

Seeing her like that, I could only sigh while drooping my shoulders.

“I don’t want you to do dangerous stuff and as a student I want you to be studying at school, is what I mean.”

“It’s fine. I’m actually pretty smart you know?”

Lifting her bag on her shoulders, she looked at me with a serene smile. Trust—I can feel her trust in me from her gaze. I’ve seen that gaze countless times during our journey. That’s why I can’t reject it now either. But I still questioned whether I actually had enough strength to be called worthy of receiving that smile. I, can only work hard and try my best to answer her smile, her trust. But the gap between our powers wouldn’t disappear.

“My studies will also be fine. Also……if I get into trouble, help me again alright?”(aya)

But Aya still said something like that to me with a smile. Those words were definitely said because she remembers the promise I once made to her long back.

Rustling my hair, I averted my gaze. That was embarrassing. In fact, I want you to help me…….But I can’t say that since I’m the guy and the adult here. I can’t ask a girl younger than me to protect me after all.

“……”

“……..um, your reply?”(aya)

Now then, how should I answer that? Thinking, I looked towards Miss Francesca who was glancing towards us. Feirona and Mururu didn’t care about us and were busy doing their packing. I’m thankful for that. Miss Francesca must be wondering why a hero like Aya chose to accept such a request I guess. Well, the reason’s nothing more than the fact that I and Aya know each other.

The meeting place I had put in the request was the city's east gate but when I got there, I really was surprised since Aya was there waiting for us. Apparently, even Souichi was perfectly okay with Aya coming with us. Well, that guy is Aya's ally before anything.....though there's also the part where he really can't go against Aya as well. Please try to be a bit more stronger, Souichi.

Well, certainly this is a great help for us but how am I supposed to explain why a Hero was taking part in this quest to others? I wonder how much would it normally cost to hire a Hero to do your request?

I wasn't even expecting anyone. Worst case we three, Feirona, me and Mururu, alone would be journeying alone or so I thought. It was already a great surprise when Miss Francesca decided to accept that request. Though that itself was pretty weird. Why would she even accept such a dangerous request?

According to the person herself, she just wants to have an adventure. But the details were even more interesting.

Soon, Miss Francesca would graduate from school. As a noble daughter, she'd have very less freedom after that. After all, nobles have various duties of their own. After she graduates she won't get any chance to go on something like an adventure. I doubt her family would even allow something like that.

I have quite a few nobles in my list of acquaintances as well. I remember that they didn't have much freedom either. Thinking that way, Miss Francesca has actually received quite a lot freedom. I guess there'd be quite a lot of nobles who wouldn't see that as good but that's her problem to deal with. I can't help with that.

This journey would be dangerous, it could even be fatal for her. While understanding that, she still wants to come with us so I can't really refuse her. It's better to have as much firepower as possible after all.

"I'm done with the preparations. What about you?"

"Yeah, I'm done as well."

I called Feirona and it seems they're done with prep as well and were walking towards us. Aya's gaze felt like it became stronger towards me but I didn't pay it any heed. Unfortunately, I've decided to stop saying extremely embarrassing phrases from now on. In the first place, only heroes have the right to say those kinds of lines. They're too heavy for me.

We had bought 3 horses. Feirona on one horse, Mururu and Miss Francesca on one and me and Aya on the last. I would have preferred to have Miss Francesca behind me but if I had said that, let alone falling in a hole, I feel like I would've been burnt to death.

Thinking such stuff, I turned towards Mururu. She's making a somewhat sleepy face probably because she's not a morning person. Even though we're leaving on a difficult journey, I felt calming down a bit seeing her face.

"Wake up, Mururu. It's to depart."

"Un—I'm fine."

You definitely don't look fine at all though. Miss Francesca shook her by her shoulders to wake her up but that only made her head to sway front and back. Her ponytail also swayed along with it making it look amusing.

When I looked towards Feirona, he shrugged his shoulders as if troubled. I'm not really minding it since I only feel calmer due to her.

"Leaving the sleepy girl aside, I look forward to working with you, Aya-dono."(elf)

"Yes, same here."

Like that, Feirona and Aya did a formal introduction to each other. But even though it didn't feel very stiff probably because of their personalities.

While I was thinking that, I felt something pull my mantle. On looking, it was Mururu.

"What is it?"(renji)

“Who?”

She asked that while pointing towards Aya.....So she really doesn’t know. I am one thing but it was surprising that she didn’t recognise even Aya. At that Miss Francesca panicked and hurriedly explained her about Aya. Well, it’s not like Aya’d get angry just because Mururu didn’t recognise her you know? She’s not that narrow minded. In fact Aya would find it better to be honest.

It’s really tiresome to be treated as a Hero constantly. Mentally, that is. I think Aya is of the same opinion since she looked at Mururu and Francesca with a troubled expression.

“.....a Hero chosen by the Goddess.”

I don’t know how Miss Francesca explained her but that was how Mururu described Aya now.

“Nice to meet you, um.....”(aya)

“Mururu.”

“I see. Nice to meet you, Mururu.”

“Likewise.”

While smiling wryly, Aya greeted Mururu. Mururu didn’t seem to be on guard against Aya either and greeted her back as well.

“So we’re done with the pleasantries?”(renji)

“Yeah. Let’s depart quickly.”(elf)

“un.”(mururu)

Mururu nodded at Feirona’s words and we split in our respective groups.

Originally, Mururu was supposed to be with me and Aya with Miss Francesca but Aya changed that. The reason.....as an adult I shouldn’t pry too deeply into that. But I should say that even I wouldn’t get feelings for a child like Mururu in any case.

The horses in this world were more robust and strong-built ones like in armies ratehr than the racehorses we see normally. They were strong

enough to carry two grown humans along with luggage and still have enough stamina to run. But in exchange, they weren't that fast though still much faster than walking. Sitting on the saddle made for two first, I extended my hand towards Aya.

Taking my hand, and using that as a fulcrum, she skilfully sat on the saddle. When someone has good looks, they sure look beautiful even while doing the most mundane of actions.

On glancing towards miss Francesca and Mururu, they had also climbed on their horse. Miss Francesca was in her usual travel clothes along with her leather breastplate and Mururu was wrapped in her white cloak. But since she was on a horse, her volptuous thighs were visible to the eye from under the cloak.

While I was looking at that, Aya suddenly pinched me from behind. It actually hurt a bit.

"I leave the horse riding to you."(aya)

"Hm, yeah."

Giving a short reply, I made the horse start running. If I were to give some excuse, I'd only be dragged deeper into the swamp after all. I know that from my own life experience. A good man doesn't make the mistake twice. Probably.

The guard on the gate was surprised by my and Aya's appearance but I decided to ignore him. After I'm done with this request, I should probably retire to some rural village once again. I don't want to stand out like this any longer after all.

[What were you doing?]

"Nothing weird, really."

When I said that, I heard a sigh from inside my pocket. I really am not trusted at all.

"Souichi looks at Francesca-senpai's chest a lot as well.....are all men like that?"(aya)

"....."

That's really difficult to answer. Not to mention, that the person herself seems to have heard the question since I felt that her horse slightly moved away a bit from us. Must be my imagination.

But really there is no way to answer this question. At least not for a 28yr old man to a 18yr old girl. Somehow I could only apologise to Souichi in my head. It seems Miss Francesca's affection points for him instantly dropped even though he wasn't even here.

As the horse swayed while running, Aya hugged me tightly from behind so as to not fall off. Right now she wasn't in her uniform but was in a light, scarlet robe with silver embroidery which could make one feel the sensation of her skin almost directly. Though her height has grown, she hasn't really grown. Obviously, I can't say that out loud. Well, I was also wearing a robe over my tunic so what I felt wasn't really that much.

These clothes of her were made out of holy silver thread taken from a special bug/crawler then had the protection of the Fire spirit Salamander applied on it turning it into a scarlet colour. Above that, the embroidery was made out of mithril as well. The robe she wore above it was also made out of the skin of a water dragon. On her waist was a mithril short sword with an emerald embedded at the end of the handle; and a magicians short rod with an almost transparent amethyst like gem embedded on top.

It's the same equipment as when she had fought against the Demon God. All of it were so valuable that they were essentially priceless. It could make one think that she was leaving to maybe start a war all on her own. Well, when you're on a journey, actually it might be better to be well equipped like her. You don't know what could happen after all so its better to be at top equipment always. I, who buys no new equipment due to lack of money is actually the one who does it wrong.

"But still, when we're on horses like this, you end up thinking back of times when we travelled together right?"(renji)

".....haah."(aya)

She gave a sigh seeing that I had dodged her question but she didn't pursue any further. Thank god for that.

"That's true. After Yui-chan contracted with that Dragon, we started to always use that dragon to travel."(aya)

Hiyuu Yui. One of the heroes known as the Monster User/Tamer. She was the youngest among us 13. I wonder how she's doing these days. All of the monsters she contracted were famous ones. A Fairy who was a master in spirit magic. A Ghost Knight that was immortal and a master swordsman. And an ancient dragon that called itself a king. I think they should be at the Elfreim continent right now. That place might be better to live in right now.

"Do you know what Yui's doing nowadays——?"(renji)

"I wonder. Maybe Yuuko-san knows about it."

Utano-san eh. I wonder what that person is doing right now as well. But considering it's her, she must have taken a lot of workload on herself and working hard right now, I guess. That's the kind of person she is. She can be scary at times too though.

"Renji, let's head straight towards the Forest of Rotting Souls."(elf)

"Sure! We'll go till the entrance and spend the night there. "

Making the horse run by our side, Feirona told us about our current destination. Forest of Rotting Souls. As it name suggests, it's a place where the dead walk and ghosts appear and the living rarely enter. The highway to the capital is made going around this forest but if we break through it directly, we'll be able to reduce a lot of time. Last night, me and Feirona decided to break through it while planning our routes to take.

Zombies are pretty tough but they have dull movement. Ghosts are harmless as long as you have a strong spirit/will. If we wanted to kill them we'd need silver-made equipment but if it was just to pass through, it was pretty easy.

Well, originally only me, Feirona and Mururu were going to be travelling but now that we have Aya and Miss Francesca with us as well, we could

kill them with magic too. Zombie's could be killed with physical weapons but ghosts were completely spirit types. Either magic or silver was compulsory. At first we could only ignore them and rush through the forest but now we would be pretty safe while going through it.

The only problem left is to make sure that we don't get lost. But with Feirona, the elf, with us, we should be fine with that as well.

[Journeying with Aya. How nostalgic.]

"Yes, that's true. I'll be in your care as well, Eru."(aya)

[Yeah, I leave Renji to you Aya.]

"…….why me?"

I could only sigh. It's true though so I couldn't really refute it either.

It's been one year since I travelled with Aya, with one of my comrades.

While running through the early morning, misty highway, I felt myself getting a bit excited. Aya must be the same as well. Thinking that, I became a bit happier.

Chapter 27 Road to the capital (4)

*

The view from the back of the horse felt nostalgic and it cheered me up. I felt it was unbecoming of my age.

Riding horses required stamina of a different kind than walking. What I want to say is, my whole body hurts.

"…… I'm tired."

[Again you're talking like that.]

I had heard Ermenhilde's fed up voice countless times already.

But I really am tired. Even though a year ago I used to work hard, fight during the day and be on guard duty during the night. I wonder is it the one-year blank or have I just got too old for this.

While thinking about that I threw wood into the fire in front of me.

"Shouldn't you sleep for a while?"

"Yeah. Switch with me later."

Feirona asked me that worriedly, but the order for night duty had already been decided. Well, I'll switch with him after a few hours I just work hard till then.

They must have been tired from the journey because Ms Francesca and Mururu at already gone to sleep on the soft grass. Since we did not prepare anything comfortable like a tent, they were sleeping with just a blanket covering the whole body.

Only me and Feirona and Aya one awake right now. We had surrounding the bonfire but there was barely any conversation. In the darkness of the night only the sound of the fire crackling could be heard.

"Then, I'll go to sleep first."

“Please do. I’ll wake you up when it’s time.”

“……Then, take your time.”

“—wha”

what the hell does he mean by that. Giving a scornful laugh I broke another piece of wood for the fire.

Giving me a suggestive look by, he also went to sleep. Only me and Aya remained. Also Ermenhilde.

“Is it fine not to go to sleep?”

“um……. Yes.”

I see. I threw more wood into the fire.

I did not say it out loud but I once again felt nostalgic.

During the journey to kill the Demon God we often spent time like this. I wonder how long has it been……

At first she was cautious of me and barely talked. After that incident with the Ogre, she began talking. I recall the reason but cannot remember exactly how long ago it was. Probably, Aya remembers though. Realising that I felt a bit apologetic.

“It feels nostalgic right?”

After a long silence, she spoke up.

“Yeah, that’s right. Back then we used to spend lot of time like this.”

“…… Yes.”

When I said she replied in a happy manner. Was she happy that I remembered it was it simply because she could start a conversation. It was probably the former.

Her face shining from the fire looked more mature than those times.

“Say, Aya.”

“What is it?”

“How is your life in the Academy? Is it fun?”

When I asked that she looked at me and started laughing. She was trying to restrain herself apparently it was too funny.

Did I ask something weird? I tilted my head in confusion.

“Renji-san asks questions like an actual father would.”

“…… Really?”

That was not really my intention. I could only scratch my head. That must have been funny as well because she started laughing again.

[Why not ask something more romantic instead?]

“Like what?”

What kind of question is that?

Thinking that——-

“Say, Aya.”

“fufu, what is it this time?”

“Hm…..”

I tried to think of a topic but nothing came to my mind. Questions regarding romance came to mind but if asked her “do you have a boyfriend?” I know exactly what would happen to me……

Yayoi-chan probably would not have gotten a boyfriend and Souichi had not gotten a girlfriend when I asked him the last time. That guy is awkward and sucks it lying so it’s probably true.

Somehow I feel that the difficulty of asking questions suddenly increased due to what Ermenhilde said to me.

“Mouu”

As I spent time just looking at her, Aya sighed somewhat fed up yet somewhat enjoying this. To be unable to even hold a proper conversation, I really am an useless adult.

As I dropped my shoulders, Aya threw more wood into the fire while showing a gentle smile.

While looking at her smile, I once again felt that she had become more mature. Back then she had a childish side to her and a cute one as well. Though sometimes she would surprise me by suddenly acting like an adult as well.

But her current smile held a womanly charm that could captivate anyone. Feeling a bit weird, I averted my gaze from her to the fire. What am I thinking of a child 10 years younger than me? I sighed again. I, myself, feel more childish than her. It was both pathetic and embarrassing.

"The Magic Academy, it's fun. I made a lot of friends and could also read lots of magic documents as well."

[Friends? If it's Aya, you must have a lot of many friends as well?]

Don't ask that. As usual, I could only hope that my partner would learn to read the mood.

I don't know how she took that question, but she was now looking shyly towards the fire. She really has grown a lot this past one year. I had never seen smile like this before.

For the time being, let's just hit Ermenhilde inside my pocket and hope it tries to read the mood more.

"Well, as long as you're having fun, it's fine. It's important for classmates to have fun with each other."

Once again I averted the topic. Though it must be like Ermenhilde had said. I am also a man after all, whether it be my comrade or someone younger than me, I end up seeing them in that way anyway. Right now, we were talking like it's normal but we had not been summoned, we would never had even made contact.

And now she even had the title of a hero. It's normal to have the attention of guys.

"..... Is that it?"

Apparently she was not happy with my words because she was now

pouting and I also felt that her gaze had become sharper as well. Pretending to have not noticed that I threw more wood into the fire.

[Seriously.]

“I just want Aya to simply enjoy a normal life as a student.”

Probably, Utano-san had the same reason to send these kids to the magic Academy. They were 15 years old. Normally one would spent time playing with their friends at this age.

“Renji-san always runs away like that.”

“I’m an adult after all.”

“It’s not fair.”

“Adults are never fair, Aya.”

When I shrugged my shoulders saying that, I only got a sigh in response. Ermenhilde was the same.

If I had to answer honestly, I’ll have to take a step forward. I’ll have no choice but to clearly understand what she expects from me.

And I don’t think even she wants that. As a result, even though she would show discontentment when I ‘run away’ like this, she never gets truly angry. I think she enjoys my playing with words.

We were silent for a while after that. Once again, only the sound of the crackling fire, the swaying of grass doing and sleeping sounds of Ms Francesca came to our ears.

“It really is nostalgic, right?”

“It truly is.”

I feel we’ve had this same kind of conversation a long time before.

I would be unfair and she would be direct and honest.

What is it that she expects from me I wonder.

During the journey, both Utano-san and Toudo would often scold me. But even so, we have yet to find the answer. And even if we did I wonder if

I could see that out loud.

[You 2 seriously..... Don't make any progress at all.]

"You just keep your mouth shut."

This bastard, I really will throw away.

"Eru has also changed."

[Hmm?]

"You have become more humanlike."

[..... I am a weapon though.]

I silently laughed at Aya's words. When I did, I could feel Ermenhilde's atmosphere become disappointed.

It can't be helped, after all, I see you as my partner and not just a weapon. That's why I felt happy when Aya said that. And it's amusing to see you get disappointed at that in such a human like way.

"So she says."

[Why do both of you don't treat me like a weapon..... No, all of you 13 summoned ones are like that.]

It even started grumbling like that.

That was even more amusing as me and Aya started laughing again. It's your fault for saying something so strange.

"You really should go to sleep now."

"I will go to sleep when it's your turn to sleep as well."

There's deep meaning behind what she said, but depending on how you look at it, one could really take it the wrong way.

"I hope you don't say that to someone else as well?"

"I don't. Only to you, Renji-san."

She started giggling. I thought of answering in an amusing way but gave up in the end simply scratched my head.

I wonder serious or just messing with me. Must be the latter. Cause that would be better for my heart.

“I see.”

“Yes.”

I could reply like that only and she as well replied with just one word.

I think that’s fine to be honest.

While we gazed at the bonfire in front of us, I gave a sigh. Even after one year we haven’t changed. I wonder if that’s good or bad. If I were to use Ermenhilde’s words, there is no progress.

When I was thinking like that, Aya silently stood up. And came and sat beside me just like that.

“You did this when we were travelling as well back then a lot.”

“.....Mouu.”

But I feel that the distance between us is shorter than what it was back then. Would this be called as progress I wonder.

[fumu.]

Also, it’s troublesome that I don’t have anyone to entrust Ermenhilde with like I had back then.

Normally I would leave it with Souichi or Utano-san. I should think about maybe giving it to Ms Francesca or Feirona the next time we camp. Well, it’s not like this party would continue for ever. I would probably not travel with Aya after this.

In the end after that we barely talked any more. The fact that I had stayed on night duty more than required and forgot to wake up Feirona till much later, I’ll just consider this that we were serious in our duty. I guess I must have been affected too much by my nostalgia.

The fact that the we have made no progress, means that our relationship has not changed in any year. That in turn means that my position inside Aya’s heart has not changed even though I had

disappeared so selfishly. I should be happy for that——- right?

After switching with Feirona, I positioned myself so. Giving a wry smile, I closed my eyes.

“Goodnight, Ermenhilde.”

[Yes. Sleep well, Renji.]

Tomorrow, we will be going through a forest filled with ghosts and undead. I won’t have the time to think of such useless things.

I hated that part of myself that ran away from my own thoughts.

Adults really are dirty. They only run away all the time.

Chapter 28 Forest of Rotting Souls (1)

*

As the horses galloped, we ran through the forest.

As the name of the forest would suggest, the earth and every tree was rotting and the undead and spirits would appear in this forest.

Just running through the rotten land would consume stamina and the miasma released by the rotting trees tried to decrease our sanity. Zombies would aim for living beings like us and try to make us also like them. Ghosts that had mist like bodies would decrease our mental resistance, and show us nightmares when we sleep. Countless corpses can be seen while crossing through this forest and the dark miasma released by the trees would not allow sunlight to enter the forest.

I feel that we should exit this forest as soon as possible but this forest was extremely dense. Even if we use horses to run through the shortest distance, it would still take at least five days.

“Feirona, can you keep on going a bit more?”

“Yeah, no problem. But before that——”

“I’ll take care of Ms Francesca and Mururu. You just focus on breaking through this forest.”

“Got it.”

I confirmed his condition by going a bit closer to him on my horse.

The one most affected by crossing this forest is Feirona. Without any protection of the spirits, the effect of the hatred from the dead and spirits on this elf was more than what I expected. Even he himself, who lived in the forest of magical energy, did not expect it to be so. He seems to be trying to hide it but the colour of his face seems really bad. He is it sick yet but one could tell from a single glance that his condition was growing

worse.

Even though I was supposed to know how troublesome evil spirits can be, I still didn't expect the effect to be this big. And it's not like this is the first time I'm travelling within an elf either. But the last time I did so it was through a forest that had immense protection from the spirits I think. I see, I think I once again understood why elves are called as the watchmen of the forests. His condition is not that bad yet but that doesn't mean it can't get worse. I must do something. I thought about it as I ran on my horse. The best thing to do at such times would be to take a rest but even that was difficult in this forest.

There was no paved roads in this forest. Even now, we are moving forward with the help of Feirona's foreseeing abilities as one of the inhabitants of forests. And it would be really bad if he became unable to move.

"It would be nice if we could at least sleep well during the night."

[That would be even more difficult in this forest though.]

I guess so. While the sun was up we would move towards the east where the capital is but at night we will get attacked by zombies and ghosts.

It's amazing that we can still move even after having not rested for three whole days. Since we let the females get sleep in priority, my and Feirona's fatigue had reached its peak.

I only have to fight with my sword so it's fine as long as I last while we move but our movement was dependent on Feirona's experience so at least I wanted him to get some rest.

"If only you could become a silver sword we would have less problems to deal with."

[Even I would be more relaxed if I could but unfortunately I am neither silver nor Mithril.]

Well, I wasn't expecting much anyway. Saying that inside my mind, I lined up alongside Ms Francesca's horse while running.

That Jade Green coloured sword was made of material that could not be found anywhere on this world. To be honest Ermenhilde was a sword made out of only magical energy. It even had the weird property to increase its sharpness, attack power and intensity only by releasing the seven constraints put upon me by the goddess. Just like silver is effective against the undead spirits, Ermenhilde's blade was one of the rare weapons that can wound a God.

Certainly, that was a very rare effect but it was useless in this current situation. It could work as a normal weapon against zombies but would have no effect on spirits and ghosts. As usual, I felt like crying from the uselessness of my cheat.

"Ms Francesca."

"What is it, Renji-sama?"

An energetic voice came to me as reply.

Because we let them rest at night, Ms Francesca and Mururu were still energetic. Currently Aya was resting behind me by closing her eyes. She is not asleep, but I still felt slightly embarrassed by seeing how much trust she put on me. Thinking that for a second, I realised that I was being imprudent and removed those thoughts by shaking my head.

"Mururu as well, tell me if you feel like you can't go on any longer. We will take a rest then."

"fufu, thanks for your consideration. But I'm still fine."

Saying that she gave up a soft smile which made me feel calm as well. But that was also only for a second. Her gaze suddenly became serious. It's same time Feirona running at the front also stopped his horse, and Aya was resting while leaning on back also stirred and prepared for battle.

When I finally looked towards the front, I saw armoured human zombies standing as if blocking our path. Well that probably is not their intention but they still were in the way. Looking closely I also saw 2 mist like things floating around them; must be ghosts.

They say you cannot see spirits but through their evil intentions and hatred the ghosts in this world held mist like bodies. Well, it made things easier for us though. The first time I saw them, rather than getting scared, I just felt 'this really is a fantasy world eh?', that's all.

Zombies didn't have clear thoughts or will. They didn't swarm like goblins and simply attacked the living due to pure instinct.

In contrast, ghosts would control zombies or other undead that had weak wills to attack the living. There were even more troublesome enemies like vampires and Grim Reapers that had the same abilities as well.

If there was a clergy with us we could purify them with the goddess's miracle but a clergy that could use such a high level miracle would not go on an adventure in the first place. He/She would remain in the church while praying to the goddess. I may be prejudiced on that though.

"Aya, I leave the ghosts to you. Ms Francesca go to Feirona's side."

Saying that I climbed down from my horse and at the same time Mururu came beside me. Normally we would ignore such enemies but seeing that Feirona stopped, that must be the path we have to go on. Concluding that, I decided to quickly take care of this.

"I'll take the right."

"Then, the left is mine."

At the same time I kicked the earth and ran. Her cloak flapped open and Mururu's both hands grew out knife-like claws and were wrapped in white fur. As she ran towards the zombies with physical speed incomparable to mine, she mowed down their rotting flesh with those claws. Unable to withstand the shock, zombies fell to the ground with their limbs blown off. Then she proceeded to kick away their heads as if it was daily work.

Zombies were really weird. They fall into confusion if their heads get blown off. But no matter how many times you pierce their heads with arrows, they were unaffected. Normally, one would focus on blowing away

their heads till nothing remained of it. A theory suggests that something —— like an evil spirit or bug has attached itself to the corpse and is controlling it but I'm not interested in checking that. Sounds disgusting. As long as I know how to kill it I don't care.

I also came close side-by-side to her and attacked the zombie's neck with my iron knife. The first swing cut through halfway and then completely severed it from the reverse slash. It would have been impossible if it was a living being but since their flesh as rotten and muscles have decayed, this much was enough.

[Or you could use me you know?]

"You want to cut through rotting flesh?"

[..... I am a weapon after all.]

You just hesitated, did you not?

Giving a wry smile, I face the remaining one. At that instant the two ghosts also burst up. Aya must have used her magic.

Inside the silent forest, and explosives sound resounded. Three times.

For some reason ghosts were weak to magic. Magical energy—-were they weak to magic as it was turning your mental will to offensive ability or was it due to some other reason? And it was not like anything would work. Only Fire and lightning type magic were effective.

It was pretty common in fantasy games but when you see that occurring in reality as well, you will become curious behind the reason.

Even while I thought of such things, I didn't stop my hands and severed the head of the final zombie. Since they have rotten flesh, it has very dull movements. Apparently, humans unconsciously restrain their own power to not destroy their own bodies but zombies don't have that either. But if their flesh has rotten to this extent, even that is useless. Their arms would fall of just if they try to grab me and their legs would get torn off just by running a bit.

Mururu was already heading towards Miss Francesca. As expected, she

didn't want to cut through rotting flesh with her prided claws it seems. I wonder what did it feel to cut with your own claws. When I asked, she said only word–Disgusting. Well, if she says that it means she still isn't used to using claws on living things.

After confirming that all of them were dead, I returned to my horse on which Aya was already sitting.

"That helped."

"You're welcome."

Taking her small hand, I once again climbed the horse.

Due to the loud explosion just now, the forest's silence felt even more eerie now.

"Then, let's hurry up and move further."

As if he was waiting for me, Feirona began to move with his horse again. I and Miss Francesca moved our horses to follow him as well.

By my expectations, we'll still take 2 more days. There's still a long way to go before we leave this forest. Thinking that, I naturally leaked a sigh.

"Are you alright?"

Aya asked me from behind as she put a bit more strength in her arms around my waist. It's nice to be this close to a girl but if I am allowed to say something unromantic, this makes riding the horse more difficult so please spare me from this.

She seemed to be saying something but it was drowned by the sound of horses running and the blowing wind. When I was about to ask her again, Feirona came near us on his horse.

"Did something happen?"(renji)

"There's something there––"

Saying that, he stopped his horse and climbed down.

Then, he kneeled to the ground and traced through the earth with his finger. On looking closely, I realized that it was actually footsteps. It's

amazing how he had noticed that.

Even I have learned how to walk through a forest somehow but I guess I'm still incomparable to an Elf, I guess. And to have noticed this from atop a horse, it can only be called as amazing.

I also climbed down and confirmed the footsteps. They were not normal footsteps. It was not the sole of shoe, but was slender long finger like. Like a leg's bone fingers.

"A skeleton?"

"Probably. And a giant one at that."

Going by the footsteps it must be at least three times bigger than me. It must be an Ogre class skeleton at least or maybe a chimera type skeleton. You can't guess exactly what type it is just from the footprints but it's certain that a much higher level of monster is there.

"Did something happen, Feirona-san, Renji-sama?"

"Yeah, a little. Mururu you smell something weird?"

"Nothing different. The whole forest has a rotting smell."

She grimaced as she answered that.

In such situations, the enhanced smelling ability of beast men come in handy here but this forest was an exception to that.

"Did a troublesome monster appear maybe?"(aya)

"It is a skeleton. Probably an Ogre or chimera type....."

"To speak in Souichi's words, a boss character?"

"That's a nostalgic word. But yeah, something like that."

Back then we always called monsters so. Remembering that I started feeling nostalgic again. At first we really treated this as a game after all. Different world. Fantasy world. We were excited from a world where swords and magic ruled. So excited that we had forgotten that swords take life and we were always near death's door.

At the same time, I also felt my nervousness fade a little as well.

After three years I felt that I really have changed. To kill and get killed. Even though I'm on an adventure unbelievable from the point of view of someone living in the modern world, here I am calming down from remembering my previous adventure. I realised that I had gotten too used to this world as well.

"Boss?"

"Meaning a strong one, something like the master of this forest. If we defeated our journey might become easier for the remaining time."

As expected, the others did know what a 'boss character' meant so I gave them a short explanation. Well it's not wrong.

"It will be easy as long as Aya blows it away."

[Why are you completely depending on others..... I'm here as well, you know?]

"Skeletons would be too tough for me."

Saying that I shrugged my shoulders on which Ermenhilde gave a sigh. It can't be helped after all; I gave an excuse. I could destroy it with an axe or hammer created by Ermenhilde but I'm not good in using either of those. Even spears are difficult to swing around.

Also, rather than going into close combat with a weapon you're not good with, it is much more effective and safe to simply blow the target away with long-range magic attacks.

It doesn't want to cut zombies and it can't cut ghosts. And the skeleton will be too much for me. I guess it must be worried that it hasn't been of much use during this whole journey till now.

Though in my opinion that's how journeys work, to have the right person at the right job. It's not necessary for me to be able to do everything. Feirona takes care of moving through the forest, Vanguard is left to Mururu and ghosts are taken care of by Aya and Ms Francesca. Since would have been bad if I did nothing, I'm just moving to make sure everybody else can make the best of their abilities. That's also an important job in a party.

“fufu, it’s fine. I have also become much stronger than what I was a year ago.”

Aya said that by puffing her chest proudly on top of the horse. How dependable.

Also, if you become too strong I really might start asking you to protect me so try not to become too strong, okay?

Even though she was already much stronger than me a year ago, just how much stronger has she gotten now? I think sooner or later she really might become strong enough to take down the Demon God alone in magic battle.

“That’s good to know.”(renji)

“we also have Renji-sama as well.”(fran)

[that’s true.]

“Unfortunately, I’ll just be in the way this time.”

[.....Oi.]

Bringing out the medal inside my pocket, I stroked it with my finger.

I have the will to fight but there’s no one here that needs to be protected by me. Aya, Feirona, and Mururu, all three are stronger than me. Even Ms Francesca has become a reliable adventurer now. She might not be stronger than me but she should be able to protect herself at least.

In such a case, only one of my covenants will be cleared. My will to fight. That is not much different from the fight against those goblins. In such a situation, it would be difficult for me to face a skeleton. Especially if it’s against an Ogre or chimera type.

To be unable to fight with a stable level of power is one of the biggest weaknesses of my cheat. There are times when three or four of my covenants are released against mere goblins or orcs yet there are times when only one of them is released against even boss class monsters.

I don’t even know how many times I have sighed at that fact. Today as well, I sighed once again. Aya looked at me probably having understood

my thoughts but I decided to ignore it.

"Well, let's quickly take care of this. After the sun sets, the enemy will have the advantage."

"That's true."

I agreed with Feirona's words. It would be troublesome to be ambushed in the darkness of the night.

Due to the different world compensation/cheat, Aya also has a stronger physical body than normal but as a magician she is much weaker than someone like Souichi.

It would be better if we went all out on attack and finish it quickly, just to be safe.

"For the time being, let's keep heading east. Going by the direction of the footsteps, that skeleton seems to be moving that way as well."

"Yes. Please tell me when you find it."

"Got it."

But, well, it would be better if we did not meet it at all, I think.

I want to avoid useless battles. No matter how strong Aya is, it's never certain how the battle proceed.

You might end up endangering not just yourself but you comrades as well due to some unexpected situation. The safest would be to escape this forest without ever meeting that skeleton.

"I really want to get out of this forest already."(Renji)

[....muu.]

"Why are you sulking?"

[During this journey, I have done absolutely nothing at all.....]

I don't really mind that though. In fact, this partner of mine should learn how to depend on its comrades more. Well, I feel that it will just get angry that I depend too much on mine.

“I don’t really mind either.”

Aya must have heard it’s voice as well since she was also consoling it. She really is cute in times like these. Maybe because she’s always scolding others most of the time, this has more impact.

“Depend on me a bit more, Eru.”(aya)

[but still...]

“It will make me happy though?”

I listened to their conversation as I controlled my horse so as to not fall back behind the others.

Depend on me, eh?

Well, unlike myself, she actually has the strength to backup those words so there shouldn’t be any problem. Without the strength I tried to be like that which is why I failed so many times. Just because I’m an adult doesn’t mean I could do everything. But well, because I worked hard like that, I was able to gain the trust of my comrades.

You really don’t know how your actions could lead to any result in this world.

[..... I know..]

The voice that answered Aya seemed somewhat proud.

[That’s why I want to be depended upon as well, by Renji.]

—— how should I answer to that?

How should I take those words? What is the true meaning behind Ermenhilde’s words? Thinking all that, I shook my head.

“I do depend on you, partner.”

[I want to be depended upon like a weapon, partner.]

That would be impossible.

After all you are my comrade that I trust the most.

Kakaka, when I laughed like that, Ms Francesca and Mururu turned to

look towards me. Since they cannot hear Ermenhilde's voice, they must have been surprised to see me laughing so suddenly.

This is also getting a bit troublesome as well. Maybe after some more time, I should let them hear Ermenhilde's voice as well. Well, it depends on my own convenience after all. It's only allowed to my closest comrades. It's normal to think like that right?

Chapter 29 Forest of Rotting Souls (2)

*

Evening, four days after entering the forest. While preparing for the camp, I looked towards the sky. Covered by mist like miasma, the setting sun could not be seen but some of its light was passing through.

I expect us to get out of this mist by tomorrow, but there's a high chance that zombies or ghosts will appear. I wonder if it's my imagination that those guys were appearing solely for the purpose of hindering our advance.

There were a lot of uncertainties like Feirona's health and the yet to be seen giant skeleton. I might be getting a bit impatient to get out of this as fast as possible but it would be suicide to travel on horses at night. Even with the elf to guide us, we will still get ambushed.

And even if I don't hurry we will get out of this mist tomorrow for sure. I can still endure for a few more days. Well, it's usually at such moments that something unexpected is bound to happen though. Going by my experiences in this world, tomorrow will definitely be a rough day for us.

While thinking such, I once again sighed at the fact that the medal inside my pocket was still silent.

[.....]

"are you still sulking?"

[I'm not sulking. I was just thinking about something.]

"Oh?"

At such a white lie, for a second I hesitated how to answer, but then decided to let it go.

Though it might not accept it, it is definitely sulking that I don't use it as a weapon. It can be so cute at times. As I gave a slight smile,

Ermenhilde sighed disappointedly. Deciding to ignore that, I focused on gathering dry branches for the fire.

“Mururu, how much have you gathered?”

“Only a little.”

As I look towards her who was doing the same thing as me, she had only gathered sticks enough which could be held in one hand.

Maybe due to the dense mist, it couldn’t be helped that most of the dead branches were moist. We were still a bit short. Even after including the ones I gathered, we will still need a bit more. She understands that as well it seems as she went back to looking for dry branches after answering me. She will not say it out loud, but she must be fatigued as well. In a rotting forest like this one, even a beast woman’s senses would go out of order, which is why she must be irritated. Though a human like me wouldn’t understand that.

“I’ll gather the rest so you can go take a rest if you want.”

“I’m fine. This is my job.”

“I see.”

One thing I understood during the journey was that this girl had a strong sense of responsibility and duty. That should be obvious from the fact that she accepted the spirit gods request alone and came to this city by herself.

But because of her absent-minded or rather careless attitude, I ended up getting an impression that she was an airheaded girl.

She’s the type that will finish what she started. Even now, she’s working hard even though she’s tired. It’s pretty amazing for kid, I really think that. Well it’s pretty normal for an adventure though.

But exactly because she treats this ‘ normal quality’ of hers as obvious, it is valuable.

“I wonder what Ms Francesca is making for dinner?”(renji)

“….. As long as I can eat it anything works.”

“haha—-that’s true.”

Though that might sound rude, I ended up agreeing with her.

During our previous journey, I was the one in charge of the. That was because I thought that Ms Francesca, as a noble, wouldn’t know how to cook.

That might have been a one-sided prejudice from my side but it was correct. Yesterday’s meal was prepared by her alongside Aya but……. Well, you can guess the result.

It was a dish that needed actual courage to eat it.

Aya seemed to have practised a lot in this one year. Making an ordinary dish, she came to me with such a triumphant look that I couldn’t decide how to prevent. It was level apart from an year ago. Though I got scolded even when I complimented her for some reason. As expected, it was probably because I ended up telling the others how bad she was back then.

“Well, that’s fun in its own way.”(renji)

“Violence towards ingredients is unforgivable.”

[……. You’d go that far, eh?]

Seriously, I gave a wry smile inside my mind.

Apparently this girl was not just a glutton, she actually had deep feelings for food.

It’s not really bad—— but not something to be complimented for either. Seeing that the reason for such a comment from was our own comrade, I couldn’t decide how to respond to that.

I lose no matter which side I take. Well, I guess I can only wish that Ms Francesca’s cooking skill improved quickly as days pass. Since she likes studying, I think she’ll get better soon enough.

That said, most of our meals during journey will involve just dried meat and crackers. I doubt it is easy to cook different things out of that. Though Me, Feirona or Mururu can arrange for meat by catching wild

animals as well. They taste good just by roasting them. It will be great we could make a stew by using that and wild grass.

I started feeling more hungry just by thinking of that. As I rubbed my belly, small rumbling sound came.

“Renji can you.....”

“Hmm?”

A bit after collecting branches in silence, Mururu spoke up surprisingly.

When I looked towards her to answer, she had accumulated lots of branches in both her hands. Whether it be her or Feirona, I really am no match for them in preparing for camping.

“What is it?”(renji)

“can you cook?”

I looked at her with a blank face due to the sudden question. No well, I guess it’s not sudden considering we were talking about food I guess.

“I’m pretty normal I guess. I can make things eatable at least.”

Well, I don’t think I’m bad at it..... I have made a lot of stuff and have never received complaints from Souichi or the others.

“Really?”

“Men are pretty much at that level normally. Though Feirona..... Seems like he’d be great at it.”

[That’s true. That elf does look like he’d be good.]

Going by his atmosphere he gives of a feeling that he really can do anything. Is that just because he’s handsome?

After all, the scene of him cooking feels like it could become a painting or something. In that sense, does that make Ms Francesca hopeless beauty?

..... This might sound weird considering I was the one who thought of all this, but that really was a harsh evaluation. I definitely cannot say that in front of Ms Francesca. The first place, she is a noble lady, she

probably has never cooked in her life before. I guess it's amazing that she still could produce something that could actually be eaten. Her future is something to look forward to, yup.

"What about you? Have you ever cooked before?"(renji)

"Does roasting meat count?"

What the hell. This is the first time someone actually said that..... well not really.

In the past, both Aya and Utano-san were the same as well, I remembered. It is truly a misconception that all women can cook. That's the biggest fantasy here. Well, it makes sense though. You can't expect someone who has never cooked before to suddenly make something good.

"Next time, maybe you should learn something from Aya or Feirona?"

"I prefer to just eat."

Instant reply. Unable to answer her back, I could only avert my gaze and continue gathering branches.

It truly is very Mururu-like to say something like that. I'm really worried for this girl's future.

"Say, Mururu."

"What?"

"What are you planning on doing after completing your requested at the capital?"

"Return back to my forest..... I think."

"I see."

"I'm not sure. I want to try other food ——"

The moment she had said till that, she threw all the branches in her hands to the ground and quickly crept close to me.

Her white cloak got soiled but she didn't seem to mind that and glared towards the place she was standing before. At that the abnormal presence, I also threw away my branches and drew my iron knife.

“What happened!?”

“There’s something there!!”

Next instant, Mururu slashed the empty space with her claws. With a heavy clanking sound, sparks flew all over the place.

[An enemy!?!]

“I don’t know!!”

Depending on just the slight sound of wind cutting, I also jumped backwards. When I did so, the place I was standing before burst up.

“Magic!?”

As dust clouds rose up, the invisible assailant’s weapon became slightly visible. It can hide itself in magic but not its presence or sound. While keeping on guard for another sound of wind cutting I looked at the place where the mist like miasma was slightly wavering. Probably that’s where the main body of the enemy is. It’s clearly very far away. It could be using something like tentacles to attack as well. It is an attack from out of our reach. It’s clever..... I could conclude that it was not at the same level of ghosts or zombies. And if it can even use magic, it must be a very troublesome monster. But are there really monsters of that level in this forest? Before I could answer myself, once again the sound of wind cutting came. A cold sweat ran down my spine.

Enemies location is not certain, neither is its aim. Panicking at something I couldn’t see I ended up getting a bit late deciding whether I should block or dodge.

“Kuh!?”

[Renji, fallback for now!]

I somehow took that attack with my iron knife but my left hand went numb and I dropped it.

I somehow restrain myself from screaming which I was about to leak due to the insanely heavy attack. Unable to object at Ermenhilde’s advice, I did as it told and took some distance and took cover behind a big tree.

On the other hand, Mururu was cutting apart through the invisible enemy's attack without leaving any opening.

Must be due to her wild instincts, or maybe she was detecting the attacks from the swaying of the dislike miasma. In any case, her skill was incredible.

"Aya! Feirona!!"

Without any sense of shame, I called for my comrades with a loud shout.

I bit my lips. Was this monster waiting for us separate? For such a highly intelligent monster to have moved, it must be confident that it could at least take both me and Mururu together.

Instincts like that come to monsters or beast men much easier than to humans like us. That was irritating in itself. I was about to call Mururu but hesitated. Until the others come I have no other choice but to have her face this monster with all her strength. I don't want to break the concentration unnecessarily.

"Ermenhilde."

[I know.]

With those words, a silver long sword appeared in my hands.

Among the seven jade green gems embedded in its handle, two were shining. I don't know which of the two conditions had been fulfilled but two alone won't create a very strong weapon. I clicked my tongue in irritation but that won't change the situation. The weapon to protect me has simply changed from an iron knife to a long sword, that's all. I once again confirmed the swaying in the mist. From what seems to be the origin of the swaying, a tentacle like, whiplike something was attacking Mururu. It's movements were incredibly fast. It was impossible for me to follow it with just two of my covenants released. I could only confirm that the mist was swaying.

If it goes on like this, she'll be in danger. No matter how strong she is, I don't know how long can she fight against an invisible enemy. She is

more suited to a fast paced attacking battle. To stand in one place and take on enemy attacks is not how she fights. She probably is not moving because she would lose the movements of the opponent. If you cannot see the opponent it is better to stand your ground and focus on defence, she must have thought that way.

Should I wait for the others or should I move? Opening and clenching my left hand, I tried to get rid of the numbness.

"We are going to rush it."

[Got it.]

Saying that, I jumped out from the cover of the big tree and rushed towards what I thought of as the origin of the swaying in the shortest distance. Due to my movements which came exactly when it's attack had been deflected by Mururu, the enemy's movement stopped for a second. It must have hesitated in deciding which one to attack first between the two.

But that hesitation only lasted a second. His aim was me. Confirming the swaying of the mist, I predicting the place and timing where the attack would come. Silver sword in my hand creaked from the impact, and my body felt like it had gone completely numb for a second. Just how strong is this monster. I screamed inside my head.

But the very next instant, this time Mururu rushed towards it. Unlike me, she closed in incredible speed and slashed with her beautiful sharp claws. The sound of something hard breaking resounded throughout the forest. But—— there was no blood.

Confirming that, both of us took some distance from the monster. The space swayed and twisted and the outlines of the monster became more and more visible. It's as must have been voided due to Mururu's attack.

The first thing I saw was that it was white. It was not a pure, beautiful white like Mururu's, it was more dull, impure—— it was bones. It's size was equal an adult elephant. Inside four legs, like a spider but body was long and slim like a centipede. It's head was like an Orc with one horn. And above all that, the most conspicuous thing was the speed at which it

moved in scale; so fast that it left after-images—-

“Mu—”

My body moved faster than I could warn her.

I blocked the attack, which could even be followed, by pure intuition. The sword I was holding was blown off and my body flew unable to withstand the attack.

Next moment, my body hit the ground and I rolled and then hit the trunk of a tree as a final blow. All of the air was knocked out of my body and my vision blurred due to lack of oxygen. My body limped to the ground powerless but that lasted for only a second. Forcing my body to move again, I stood up while taking support of the tree I hit just now. It might be easier if I just fell asleep right there but I know that if I did, I won’t wake up ever again.

[Renji! Renji!!]

“I can hear you. Don’t shout in my ears.....”

The next moment, a familiar feeling entered my hands. Grabbing it with my both hands, I took the Seigan stance which is often seen in Kendo. (T/N: google seigan to see what it looks like.)

My body stiffened as I heard the sound of its foot moving. Next time, I’ll cut off its damn tail with a counter. Practically speaking, it’s really difficult but I still held the sword with full confidence.

But, no attack came towards me again. Only my own rough breathing resounded in my ears.

How long did I simply stand like that I wonder. Finally, something touched my swordtip. The next moment, I swung my sword overhead and ——

“It’s fine now.”

At that voice, my tension depleted. It was a voice I had become used to listening.

“—-Mururu?”

“Un.”

“Haaaah……”

That calm voice was definitely hers, and it proved that the battle was over. Realizing that what had touched the sword just now was her finger tip, all tension left my body.

And just like that, I fell back to the ground and took a deepe, deep sigh.

“What happened to that monster?”

“It ran away.”

“……Really?”

“Un.”

Even though it was a great chance to finish me off. Perhaps it plans to make sure to kill me easily after I have weakened?

That must be the case. I started feeling a bit depressed. Considering that it knew exactly when to fall back, it must be really used to hunting. Or contrary to its appearance, it’s actually a coward. In either case, it doesn’t change the fact that its very difficult to fight against. Almost invisible, and insanely strong as well. This is cheating really! I cursed in my head.

Suddenly I felt a pain from my right hand. On looking, I had a big, deep cut running from shoulder to the elbow. Taking on that kind of attack, I’m actually lucky that this much is all I had to bear. In the worst case, my whole arm could have been ripped off.

I feel exhausted just to have survived this but I really have to stop this from bleeding too much as well.

“Are you okay?”(mururu)

While looking at my arm, she asked worriedly.

Feeling a bit happy at that, my cheeks slackened involuntarily. Though I got hurt, it’s great that we both survived this ordeal. I felt a bit better thinking like that.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

But we can’t stay here like this. Seeing that the others didn’t come here even after all this time means that something must have happened on that side as well.

As I stood up with the support of the tree again, I started walking towards what I felt was the direction the camp was in.....and then soon stopped again.

“Which way is the camp?”(mururu)

“.....I’m sorry.”

Due to this battle, I’ve completely lost our bearings. Even the tree I had marked as a landmark had been destroyed due to fight. I can’t even tell which way is west and which is east.

Mururu is the same as me so she is also just standing by me.

“Oi, Feirona!!”

I shouted in a loud voice but there was no answer.

I’m certain now that something must have happened there as well. It’s not like we went very far to gather the branches anyway. They should have noticed if such a big battle happened.

The only conclusion I can get to is that they must have been attacked as well. But I doubt there would be a more than one monster of that class so nearby each other.....or rather, I don’t want to think like that. Let’s try and not imagine the worst scenario directly. If I didn’t do so, we’ll just end up standing here all day.

As time passed, I thought of what to do next. It’d be too dangerous to just recklessly start running around to look for the camp as well. We’ll definitely get lost. But, it’ll be dark very soon. Then it’ll be time for ghosts to rampage. Before that, I really want to meet up back with the others.

“Mururu, can you smell where that monster or Aya is?”

I asked that but she shook her head. I feel that her wolf ears drooped a bit as well.

“Is something the matter?”(renji)

“Hm?”

“You seem very less energetic than usual.”

At the same time, I confirmed my wound as well. The cut is pretty deep but it’s not gotten to the bones. The blood vessel seem fine as well so the bleed wasn’t as profuse I had expected. A small piece of luck in misfortune, eh? It hurts so much I could cry but I won’t die at least.

I took help from mururu to rip of my left sleeve and used it to tie my right arm tightly to my side to stop the blood loss. This should hold it back a little. As the pain lessened my thoughts became more arranged as well.

“Cheer up Mururu, we’ll soon meet up with Ms Francesca and others.”

“Un. But will they be okay?”

“Yeah, they’ll be fine. Those guys won’t make a blunder like me after all.”

With those 2 there, they should be able to deal with it while protecting Ms Francesca as well.

I am a bit worried but Aya’s there as well. Let’s believe that they’ll be fine. Right our situation is the bigger problem. We’re lost and have no items either. And one’s injured as well. Let alone being a burden, with this kind of wound, normally you’d just abandon me. Well, I doubt Mururu’s actually that cold of a person to do that though.

“With this place as the centre, let’s look around a bit. We shouldn’t be very far away from the camp.”

“Un. We, need to treat your wound as well.”

“There’s that as well but I’m more worried about those guys.”

We are both frontline fighters. Those three are all rear line fighters. This isn’t just at the level of being a called a bad party balance. We have to really meet up fast since I’ll be the next one to get targeted definitely. I have been weakened and there’s really no condition for much of my

covenants to get released so I can't even fight properly.

While thinking of that, I realized that Ermenhilde hadn't said anything for quite a while now.

"Oi, what happened?"

I struck my pocket with my working left hand.

[.....I'm sorry.]

For some reason, I was apologised to with a heavy sounding voice.

I ended up tilting my head in confusion. Did something strange happen I wonder? I thought but couldn't come up with anything. Is it just worried about the attack from that monster? But that had nothing to do with Ermenhilde though?

"Hm?"

[Even though I kept saying things like I want to be of use to you, this is the end result.]

"No, this isn't really your fault you know?"

I was the one who was just weak.

In fact, it's a miracle that we survived after facing something like that. Neither Mururu nor Ermenhilde did anything to get blamed for.

"Don't worry about it partner. We'll win next time."

[.....Yeah.]

It's still depressed. Now how should I cheer up this partner of mine who gets depressed at the weirdest of things? While I was thinking that, I felt my mantle being pulled slightly.

On looking, Mururu was looking up towards me with upturned eyes. Shit, she's really cute.

"What is it?"(renji)

"Who are you talking to?"

Ah.

“Now that I think about it, I haven’t let you hear it, c’mon Ermenhilde, greet her.”

[What’s up with that——-no, well, never mind, I guess it’s fine.”

Normally it’d snap at me but I guess she took more mental damage than I thought.

In my opinion, it’s fine as long as I live though. As usual, its really hardheaded.

On looking at the ground, the iron knife I was using before came to my view. It had completely broken. I picked its handle but its pretty much unusable now. I just put the handle back in the sheath. Guess I’ll have to depend on Ermenhilde completely from now on.

[Hm Hm, can you hear me Beastwoman?]

“!?!”

Her small shoulders jumped up in surprise. It looks like she can hear Ermenhilde.

“My name is Ermenhilde. The sword of the Hero and the GodSlaying weapon granted unto Yamada Renji by the Goddess Astrarea.]

“What kind of intro is that. I’m not suitable as a hero.”

How many times do I have to say that, this idiot.

I ended up sighing.

“un, nice to meet you.”(mururu)

But, Mururu’s reaction was simpler than expected. She must have heard about me from either Aya or Ms Francesca already I guess. She must have been explained that back when a great hero like Aya took on this request.

[Mu……]

But apparently, Ermenhilde would have preferred if she was a bit more surprised I guess since she doesn’t seem to accept her reaction.

She was surprised when you spoke up first so it’s fine right? Be satisfied with just that.

“With the introductions now complete, let’s join up with Aya and the others as quickly as possible.”

If this goes on, if we get attacked again, Mururu may be fine but I’ll be dead.

Saying that, I began walking while looking for trees that could act as a landmark. I guess it’s a small blessing that terrain became easier to recognise due to the battle. I decided to look around the area with this place as the centre.

I hope we can join up with the others before the sun sets.

Just when I was being optimistic thinking that we could leave this forest by tomorrow, this happens. It’s really heart-breaking but I can’t really give up either.

There’s someone here who’s more than 10 years younger than me. I can’t be the one who gives up before her. Let’s do our best and keep walking. I’ll take this girl to the capital safely. Definitely.

Chapter 30 Forest of Rotting Souls (3)

*

So as to speak simply, in the end we never found Feirona and the others.

We did reach the camp but all we found was a big hole there. Considering that Aya and the others were not there, it must be a trap laid by monsters. There are monsters who can use magic as well after all. So there's a chance they can also create pitfalls like Aya and Ms Francesca.

Seeing that I got no reply even after shouting their names there, they must be at the bottom of the hole..... Seriously what's going on? I didn't make a mistake anywhere right?

I cant even jumped down the whole without knowing anything about its death or what would I find at the bottom. Mururu wanted to jump in but I stopped her by calming her down. There are magic which allows flight as well. For someone at Aya's level would be easy to save both of the others from that. But then, just why are those guys still inside that hole. It could be that they had already come out of that hole and were now looking for us. In any case, with so little information I can't decide how to move next.

I did think of simply waiting by the edge of the hole but even that was difficult. Hiding inside the hollow of a big tree, I questioned and thought with Mururu about what we should do next.

Whether it be wait for others here or go out to look for them, it won't be easy. Right now and incomparable amount of zombies are roaming around. This must be the work of that skeleton and not the usual ghosts. It must be controlling the zombies. In such a situation, rather than looking for my own comrades, I feel like I'll end up becoming a comrade of those zombies instead.

"What should we do?"(mururu)

"what indeed.."

Though the hollow of the tree was big it still didn't mean that it had enough space to easily fit to people. I was stuck really close to her and every time she moved the sensation I felt would start making me feel itchy. Definitely not harbouring some wicked thoughts but, I still feel somewhat guilty for some reason.

Unlike the hollow of the tree, it seems my mind sure has a lot of free space to think about such things. I really feel speechless.

We still haven't met up with the others but I guess I'm still calm because I trust that they'll be fine. An invisible enemy is certainly a threat but Aya isn't the type of fall behind. After all, we're talking about the genius magician. She would be able to easily protect both Ms Francesca and Feirona.—- I have to trust her like that and believe that, otherwise I won't be able to move forward. At that, Mururu looked at me with a complaining gaze.

"Are you not worried?"

"It's because I trust them. I am worried about Ms Francesca but those two are also there so it should be fine."

I'm such a liar. I'm definitely worried. But I do trust them as well..... Human emotions are such a difficult thing. And if I started worrying about who would calm Mururu?

And before that there's a bigger problem here.

Though I'm trying to be not very conscious of it, my right hand hurts. I tell without even touching that I have a fever. Have my wounds festered was that attack poisoned as well? I hope it's the former at least.

After getting wounded, though not much, I did bleed. But if I was losing energy to poison it will cause serious setbacks. I'm not the only one who'll be in danger, Mururu travelling with me would also end up in danger. In the worst-case, if I become unable to move, there would be no one to protect her.

So as to not waste my energy, I tried to spend time moving as less as possible. The air inside the hollow of the tree was caught but Mururu

within my arms was warm. And my right arm was even hotter. It feels as if a red hot rod has been inserted into my arm.

[I'm not sure but Aya and the others are probably at the bottom of that hole.]

After a while, suddenly Ermenhilde spoke up.

Only I can hear it's voice. It's convenient that neither that zombies or that skeleton can hear it.

"..... Why?"

[If they were above there's no way Aya and that elf would have not heard the sound of our battle.]

When Mururu are still small voice, Ermenhilde explain so.

I have the same opinion. That's the only possible conclusion I can get to seeing that Aya and the others did take any action even after all this time. But in that case, why are they not coming back up. Is there something down there? Or are they getting attacked there? In any case, we have been completely split.

"The problem is how should we meet up back with them?"(Renji)

"just go down the hole?"

"Without any means to climb back up its as good as us getting lost. I can't really recommend it."

But, what if they were in some kind of trouble down there?

Such a thought came to me but I quickly shook my head. Even then, there is only little we can do. Rather than that we first need to deal with that shitty skeleton—- that boss monster controling zombies.

At least then the biggest threat will be gone, and if luck is ours, the zombies would go silent as well.

"Whether we go to save them or we just wait here, first we have to take care of that skeleton."(Renji)

[that's true. Right now only this beast woman can sense that thing we

can still be ambushed.]

“..... Mururu.”(Mururu)

Suddenly, she spoke up in a small voice.

When I looked at her wondering what was the problem, her gaze was a bit angrier than her usual blank one.

“It’s not beast woman. It’s Mururu.”

Oh, so she didn’t like how Ermenhilde called her.

[Hmph, for the likes of you, beast woman is more than enough.]

“Mu.....”

“This one is very stubborn in the weirdest of things. If you want to be caught by your name, you just have to work hard and get acknowledged by it.”(Renji)

I could simply tell Ermenhilde to say it, but that won’t be interesting after all. Also you’ll have a lot to think about when she actually gets acknowledged by Ermenhilde and gets called by her name.

Well, I would be lying if I were to say that it wasn’t problematic. But, Mururu is also the type who hates losing, or rather, tries to act strong so she wouldn’t stop once she’s set on something. Though it may be for a simple reason like getting herself called by her name by Ermenhilde, I’m happy that she can still act normal even in such a situation. Losing to fear and going berserk is a very easy to understand death flag.

“Now then, that’s enough for improving our friendship. Mururu, to have any confidence of winning against that skeleton?”(Renji)

“it will be difficult.”

“I see.”

Her answer was simple one. That’s a good thing on its own but is not a happy thing to hear right now.

Of course, it’s impossible for me as well. If I wasn’t perfect condition with my right hand, I still wouldn’t have any chance of winning. It seems

Ermenhilde also understood that seeing it spoke nothing. Well, to be honest, I simply don't want to fight it. But if I did so we will remain in a deadlock. If we are to simply wait for the others, I can only see that skeleton attacking us just when we try to meet up. I think it has that level of intelligence at least.

We have no choice but to defeat that skeleton. For both, leaving this forest and to be the meet up with the others.

"But, we're not going to stay here doing nothing right?"(Renji)

"yes. I will destroy that bone monster."

"Good decision."

That monster is definitely not invincible. Recalling the previous fight, I sorted out various information about it.

As long as we can take out its tail, Mururu should be able to deal with the rest, right?

Then first I must think of a way to destroy it's tail. It specialises in ambushing its prey, I doubt it has experience of being ambushed many times. I might be being a bit too optimistic, but it's a gamble worth taking.

But even before that, we have to think of a way to get near that invisible monster without getting noticed.

My head hurts. My wounded right arm hurts. And it wasn't just slowed dull kind of pain, it's the sharp kind, as if someone was putting a sharp needle inside my wound. This is really might be dangerous. Until we meet up with the others, I really don't want to see and deal with this wound. If I did I will definitely become unable to move. After all I'm scared of fighting and hate pain. If I were to look at my own festered wound, my heart would definitely break. I'm a coward after all.

"Got any plan?"(Renji)

"no, you?"

"I'll be bait and lure that skeleton out. Mururu, you use that chance to

ambush it and destroy it's tail from its core."

[..... You call that a plan?]

"It is one, right?"

Or do you have a better plan? I asked it that but got no reply.

In truth, there are very few ways in which we can take action. This is a party of a beast woman who cant use her senses properly due to the miasma of forest, and a wounded guy who cant even use his cheat properly.

"You're really kind, Ermenhilde."

"You're just an idiot, Renji."

I have already decided to gamble on this. To win, and to survive and meet our comrades. Both Ermenhilde and Mururu have already understood that as well. We aren't really connected neither do we have any strong bonds. We don't have any great memories with each other either. But still, the warmth this girl in my arms was precious.

Death is cold. That's why, I think, living beings search for warmth. I have seen lots of my friends die. Even though they were right beside me, the next moment, they were already dead. Countless times, way too many times, I have seen death. I have felt it.

"Renji, are you scared of dying?"(Mururu)

"yes, I am."

[.....Oi.]

On Mururu's sudden question, when I answered unhesitatingly, Ermenhilde gave an objecting voice.

It can't be helped. Everyone is scared of dying. After all, everything is over when you are dead. Maybe having felt my emotions, Mururu released all stiffness in her body and completely leaned on me. I was surprised for a second, but soon accepted that. This girl, is the same as me. Afraid of fighting, scared of getting hurt. Fearing death—— and doesn't want her comrades to die. The matter how confident of strong she is, she still is a

child in her teens.

What do we call this again? Thinking for a moment, I quickly recalled.

The suspension bridge effect. Though it is not love, I am the only one by her side right now. She simply wants warmth. I was the same, so I put more strength in my arms around her.

My right arm pained but it was proof that I was still alive.

“I am the same.”(Mururu)

“It’s normal. After all, when you die you can neither meet nor talk to anyone else any more.”

No matter what.

Corpses do not talk. They won’t hold your arm when you hold theirs.

There is no warmth. Only coldness.

And above all——— those left behind only have sadness. So much, that you feel like crying till there are no tears left. So much, that rather than experiencing that sadness again, it would be better to just die yourself.

That’s why neither will I die nor will I let anyone else.

If you live, you have to live for the sake of those who died as well. Facing pain that would make you feel like dying, you have to overcome it.

I don’t want to wear such feelings, neither do I want Mururu to do so either. Same for Aya and the others as well. That’s why I will live. I will put my life on a gamble and win it.

[Seriously..... Even though you’re about to go and fight, is this fine?]

“It is, Ermenhilde. We live exactly because we are afraid of dying. And we will kill that monster because we want to live. Easy to understand, right?”

[Certainly it is——haah.]

Hearing that sigh, I felt surprisingly calmer.

It’s the same as always. I would create trouble for Ermenhilde, and it

sigh as if fed up of me.

It might be a pain for Ermenhilde but it feels really nice to me it, calms me down, these everyday exchanges.

“It will be fine.”

Mururu muttered.

“I’ll protect Renji.”

[.....Ha. Isn’t it the other way round? Even though he’s like this, Renji is the type of man who does things when it truly matters.]

First, I got surprised by Mururu’s words, then dropped my shoulders at Ermenhilde’s.

What do you mean ‘even though he’s like this’ huh? Well, I mean, I do get scolded a lot for not taking things seriously, I want to refute that. But when you say that directly to my face, well, yeah..

Rather than that, I want to think of more practical things right now. Even though I said I’ll be the bait, there is no way that shitty skeleton will fall for a easy to understand trick. If only I had something to lure it.

My arm hurts. My head is not working. But I still must think of something. Also, rather than drowning in pessimism, is nice to see that everyone is still energetic.

“I’m the stronger one.”

[.....Oi, so she says Renji. Say something back.]

“Can’t refute that.”

[You’re supposed to!!]

But it’s true, I am no match for Mururu with only two of my conditions of my covenants cleared.

At that, I reached at the question, why even two of the covenants had been cleared.

One is my fighting will. it’s the usual one. But then what is the other one?

I have not made any promises with Mururu nor am I strong enough to protect her. In fact, I am the one being actually protected .

Death of my comrades. That is not cleared until I accept it myself. I don't think Aya and the others have died. The remaining two should be impossible to be cleared in this situation. One of them needs me to talk with the goddess directly and the other—— will never be cleared ever again. No matter what.

Then—

"That thing is a descendant of the Demon God.....?"

[What?]

"Our covenants. Back then when we were fighting, two of them had been released."

[Yes, that's right. But weren't those your fighting will and to protect this beast woman?]

"I was the one getting protected you know?"

[.....as usual, you self-depreciate too much.]

Even if you say that, it was a fact. In that fight, I had been unable to do anything.

"Covenants?"(mururu)

"It's a secret between me and Ermenhilde. There are various problems due to which I cannot fight at full strength."

"Even though you might die yourself?"

"Yes, even if I might die."

This is really such a sad tale. To be unable to fight at full strength even when I myself am so close to dying. She really is an ill-natured Goddess, seriously. I think so from the bottom of my heart.

".....You're weird."

Saying that, Mururu trembled with slight laughter while in my embrace.

“What happened?”

“What can we do to so you can fight at full strength?”

Even if you ask that, I had no way of answering this girl’s question.

If I cannot use my full strength, that meant that not just me, even Mururu will be in danger. But, I just can’t use it. I’ll need some reason to protect her……or maybe, I’ll have to sacrifice Mururu, who I am supposed to protect, just to use my strength. That’s the limitations I have. That’s why its meaningless.

I don’t want anyone to die. I don’t want to abandon them, I don’t want to let go of the bonds I have. I don’t want to lose the warmth of the girl inside my arms. Really––the cheat I wished for is a warped and twisted. To protect someone, I first have to sacrifice someone else. And even then, I won’t become the strongest. To do that, to become a true GodSlayer, I’ll end up sacrificing someone most dear to me.

“Then promise me.”(Renji)

“Promise?”

“That you won’t die no matter what. That’ll you live. No matter what happens, you won’t give up.”

Let’s end this once and for all.

We will meet up with Aya and the others and then finally get out of this shitty forest as well.

The Sun has yet to fully set but that will also end soon. The night isn’t far away. It will soon be the time for the undead to roam freely.

“If you can promise me that, I will definitely take you to the capital along with everyone else.”(Renji)

There was someone who embraced me like this when I was fearing death.

Afraid, shivering uncontrollably, crying, unable to move–– yet that person embraced me and gave me warmth. That person stayed by me all the time and kept on talking to me. I wonder, if that person also felt like

this back then.

'I want to protect this life that I hold within my arms.' I wonder if that person also thought like that.....

I cannot meet that person right now, but maybe someday——-

"I promise you. I will definitely take all of you safely to the capital. I won't let you die."

Yes, that's why I cannot die here. I have overcome danger of this level countless times already. Compared to the Demon God or the Demon King, that thing is nothing more than a clump of bones.

I made a promise——" I will show you the world." Let alone half, I haven't even shown one fourth of it right now.

"Alright, I promise."(Mururu)

"good, then I promise as well."

I swore.

The promise same as back then, the oath I took, without saying it out loud, I carved it inside my mind.

—- This time definitely, I will protect. I am not a hero protagonist, I am a god slayer.

If the enemy is a descendant of the Demon God, I can fight. I can kill it. I exist for that reason, and Ermenhilde is the weapon to fulfil that reason.

After killing the Demon God, and exterminating his descendants——- I searched for a way to live other than as a weapon for Ermenhilde. So that I can live with the God slaying weapon even in this world where a God slaying weapon was not needed any more.

For this selfish wish of mine that even the goddess could not fulfil, I cannot die here.

"I will not die."(Mururu)

"I will definitely not let you die. We'll all live and go to the capital."

I closed my eyes. I smelled the faint scent coming from her, different

from my own sweat or the muddy smell of the forest, ——it was the scent of a girl.

My heart calm down from that. Somehow, I feel that my thought process is kind of perverted but I needed some way to calm myself. And there is no way I would harbour any evil thoughts towards Mururu.

She is in her teens. The same age Aya had when she was summoned here.

If I tried to lay a hand on her, I will be an inexcusable pervert. In the first place I'll probably get beaten before I try something like that. When I think of that, all thoughts of actually doing something disappear from my mind. In fact, she feels more like a daughter to me.

I had only closed my eyes for a second.

[fumufumu. I am definitely telling this to Aya later.]

"Try to read the mood, you idiot."

[That aside, Renji.]

It didn't even try to refute it. Sometimes it really acts very humanlike.

[Will you protect me as well?]

"Have no fear."

While sighing, I got out from the hollow of the tree. I gave a wry smile, as if expecting something, as if I thought of something mischievous.

There were no zombies. Probably, that skeleton is not here either. I couldn't hear it nor could sense it. I'm not sure if that thing is really a descendant of the Demon God, I might be wrong. But, I'm sure that it will definitely try to attack me, who is wounded, over Mururu.

For now, I asked Mururu to hide herself inside that hollow of the tree. Now we just have to wait for it to jump on the bait that is me. Let's hope that it's an idiot simple enough to fall for a plan like this.

Slightly away from that tree hollow, I sat down with my back to a moderately big tree. My right hand still hurts but thanks to that, my head

feels clear.

“If we die, we die together partner.”

[..... I honestly don’t feel very happy about that.]

If possible, I hope it attacks is before its night time.

I wonder if I’m being too optimistic?

Now that I think about it, I wonder how much Mururu knows about me. Seeing that she wasn’t really surprised at Ermenhilde’s voice, she must know my connection Aya and the others—-to the heroes.

After the fight is over, I think I should ask her. For that reason as well, let’s just quickly get rid of that shitty skeleton. Thinking till that, I gave a sigh.

Was this a death flag?

Chapter 31 Forest of Rotting Souls (4)

*

I wonder how long I stood there exposed to the miasma. With the sound of grass rustling, I looked that way. What appeared was not our invisible attacker as I was hoping for. It's flesh was rotten, white bones could be seen; it was a rotting zombie. It was wearing a completely ragged piece of cloth, as if it had been attacked by a wild dog or something.

Like the zombies that appear in games, its limbs were intact but it was missing its lower jaw. Was that shitty skeleton watching us from somewhere?

"Well, I guess it can't be helped."

Heave-hoI stood up.

My waist, more like my whole body hurts. The miasma isn't the only reason my body feels so heavy. The pain in my right arm seems to be growing worse every minute. But it's not like I cannot move it. It hurts like hell but I can still put strength in it. I can still hold a sword.

But I don't know when I'll become unable to move it. Thinking about how I have to face that monster in such a condition, I feel like crying. After the first zombie, as if they had prearranged it, more of them appeared one by one.

[Quite a lot have gathered.]

"Seriously. I'm an injured guy here, I wish they'd take it easy a little—— don't you think so, Ermenhilde?"

As I muttered its name, a jade coloured long sword that I had grown accustomed to using appeared in my hand. It is the double edged long sword I am most used to using in this world. With a single swing, the sound of air cutting came to my ears.

Ah, this is it. This is the sword. My palms shifted to get accustomed to it. It has just the right weight. It feels as if it is an extension of my own arm. I realised that my face had relaxed a bit at that. On the end of the sword's grip were seven gems inlaid in a jade jewel. Three of them were currently lit.

My right arm pained again. But that pain only cleared my thoughts. It reminded me what I had to do.

"Let's make Mururu speechless."

[..... Are you alright?]

And actually worried voice came from inside my pocket. Finding it amusing, my lips relaxed into a smile.

"That's rare. Normally you would be the one who'll keep on telling to act like a hero."

The situation should be exactly what Ermenhilde is always wishing for, isn't it?

For someone, for something—– put your life on the line, and to protect it. It's what people expect of heroes. That was unparalleled strength, victory, and safety. Unfortunately, neither of those are things which I could grant them.

But, just for now, just for this moment. Let's gamble with my life on the line. I'll draw out that shitty skeleton, and kill it.

[Your face looks pale.]

"It's the same as usual."

Put strength in my arm that held the divine blade. Three zombies had appeared. The number isn't really that great but given time, that will also increase. Though that would not be good for Mururu who is supposed to be on the lookout of a chance to make a surprise attack, the undead relentlessly seek the living after all. They'll keep on coming here as long as living people are here.

But that is my aim. Well the one waiting for us is not a small fry like a

zombie or ghosts, it's a shitty skeleton that might be a descendant of the Demon God. With a voice only I and Mururu can hear, Ermenhilde gave an order to Mururu to not move.

My dominant right arm won't work here. There are no comrades to save me. Only three of the covenants had been released. My enemies are countless zombies and ghosts and a mysterious skeleton. Even though it's a despairing situation, for some reason I felt not even a fragment of despair.

Zombies continue to move through the grass towards me. Slowly, as if dragging their legs, scraping of their own flesh by hitting the roots of trees and raising a indescribable sound less voice of resentment. To kill the living me, to eat me and make me one of theirs.

"Injury, the poison, this hopeless situation——- this is not the first time I'm facing one!"

Forcefully moving my heavy body, I slashed. I aimed for the body with force strong enough to not just slice but to completely crush it. The rotting flesh, the damaged muscles, broken bones; I mowed it all down and split its body to 2 pieces. I split not its stomach but its heart. But that wasn't enough to kill it. Actually, I had aimed for its neck but my aim went wrong. The fact that I wasn't using my dominant arm, and maybe due to the fever I have, my senses have been disrupted. In any case, first I must face the zombies coming at me to live.

The zombie I cut apart fell down to the ground. And the next moment, crushed it's head with my right foot. That was the first one.

Going with the momentum, I slashed again. The zombie coming at me from behind was blown away. Maybe because it was a fresher corpse, and left-arm's power alone wasn't enough to split this one apart and my sword stopped in its shoulder. But I pulled it out with brute strength and blasted that zombie away.

[Renji, to the right!]

Complying with Ermenhilde's words, I jumped to the right. I rolled on the ground move away as pebbles and twigs hurt my skin. That kind of

hurt.

But, the third zombie was about to leap on to where I was standing before. If I had got bitten by those rotten teeth, I would definitely get poisoned or get some really weird disease.

The jade sword turned to magical energy disappeared, and it its place appeared a dagger which I threw which then, pierced into its head. Another dagger appeared in my hands. It was throw with my left hand but I have trained enough to be able to use both hands for throwing. Though not as fast as my right hand throws, if I aim properly before throwing, it will definitely hit its target, the zombie's face.

Silence. The short battle correct. Well, there were only three of them after all. Even goblins could be said be worse than this for now at least. After all, they are fast and work in teams.

While I was thinking of such things, once again the grass made noise. Newer zombies appeared. They must have been attracted due to the battle. Or maybe they simply smelt a living human. In any case, that doesn't change what I have to do.

I gave a quick glance towards my right arm. Blood was dripping out of the simple treatment I had done by wrapping a cloth around the wound.

"I really hope the main guy comes quickly."

[Yeah, that's true..... Think you can hold on till then?]

"I will, somehow."

I slashed away those zombies' heads as they move towards me.

Fuuu, I breathed out. The skeleton had yet not appeared. No, I simply had not sensed it and it was simply lurking around here. It is invisible, has no presence, and neither has any smell. Inside this rotting forest, it might be the worst enemy to face. If Aya was here, at least there was the option to completely burned down the whole forest along with it.

As I thought all that, more zombies appeared. Three again. Must have been villagers from nearby. There were two who were in tunics. The last

one, was probably a soldier from the capital. It was a zombie with quite the good equipment on it.

If this was a game, I would get lots of experience points from it. Oh well, zombies don't drop a lot of money even in games though. Thinking of such things, I calm myself again.

I wonder if Mururu has noticed already. So as to not let her realise that, I must fight flashily.

Aah, my hand really hurts. Flapping my mantle, I ran with a speed that blasted off soil behind me. With a single slash, I cut apart the legs of the two zombies in tunics. I stepped on one of the zombies' neck to crush it. The feeling of flesh and bone getting crushed came through my leather boots to me. It is disgusting but I cannot stop either. Going with the momentum, I closed in on the armoured zombie.

This one is troublesome. Even if I have Ermenhilde, I still need a lot of strength cut through armour. I doubt one slash will be enough. But, I'm also confident my skill. I aimed for the joints. My attack on its elbow was blocked by its gauntlet. It's really difficult to make detailed adjusted attacks with my left arm. Clicking my tongue on missing the attack, I jumped back to try again.

The next moment, it's long sword struck the place I was standing before. Without any technique, it was an attack based on brute strength due to its the ground had exploded a little. At the same time, a large amount of blood started flowing out of that zombie's right elbow. Did its rotting flesh snap, did its bone rip through the flesh?

The weapon in my hand turned to magical energy once again and then instantly formed a rapier.

"Too slow."

I pierced through the gap in its helmet.

[In terms of technique only, you're equal to all other heroes after all.]

"No way, I was just trained too well by that monster."

Once again the weapon in my hand disappeared by converting into magical energy. And then, once again a long sword appeared in my hand.

The strongest human I know of, the Knight commander, was the one who taught me the way of the sword. Daggers, long swords, heavy swords, Katanas. As for the remaining weapons, I simply taught myself how to use them during the journey. That's why, I am the most comfortable while using swords.

[..... It still hasn't come.]

"It's only normal."

[What?]

"If I was that skeleton, I would also try to kill my opponent with just zombies. There would be no need for me to show myself after all."

As I was talking, more zombies appear. This time, they were just human type, there were even animals like dogs, goblins and orcs.

Give me a break. I felt like crying.

[But that means——- it would never appear, isn't it?]

"Yes, exactly as you say."

As long as I had my dependable jade coloured long sword in my hand, my partner with me, I can keep on going like this.

It's really weird. Is this what trust is like?

While thinking of such foolish things, I kept on fighting even in this despairing situation. I'm not alone, to have someone to talk with you is really a important thing. I have two keep on fighting till our invisible attacker decides to show itself after all.

"—— let's do this."

[Yeah.]

My concentration heightened.

If it was me I would not show myself to the enemy. Because it's dangerous.

But that skeleton did appear back then. And by doing that, it made us realise that there was an enemy we could not see. Thanks to that, we ended up in this situation. I have to be reckless like this to make the enemy appear.

And after that, when it appears, I will crush it. Destroy it, literally. It's as simple as that.

.

.

.

"Wow—- that shitty skeleton really isn't showing itself."

[.....]

How many zombies have I killed already? By breaking was ragged. My left arm felt heavy. The pain in my right arm was also increasing constantly and my body was in a bad condition due to running out of stamina.

Ignoring my fatigue, I swung the jade divine blade. If I stopped, I will die. Zombies are slow, but are physically strong. If I get caught by them in my current condition, I will really be in danger. That's why I cannot stop. Disrupting the zombies by moving around, I cut off their heads and crush them down.

Along with the miasma of the forest, my own sweat was making me feel sick as well. From the blood spraying out of the zombies—- the dead humans, my mantle and my clothes had been completely dirtied. Looks like I'll have to buy a new set of clothes after this. Though not as bad as my right arm, the number of small wounds on my body also increased. They were not really expensive, but I was quite attached to these clothes.

"Let's buy some new clothes when we get to the capital."

[..... You are still quite relaxed, aren't you?]

"Not really, to be honest."

No matter how amazing the weapon, depending on its user, its power is

limited.

Monsters are much more used to fighting than people. Monsters, the Demon King – – – and even the Demon God. To fight such existences, technique alone is not enough. What's necessary is the power to fight. Just like the humans and Demi humans of this world use magic to fight, just like beast men like Mururu depend on physical ability to fight.

But I don't have any of those. I don't have any incredible cheat like Souichi and the others, neither do I have magical energy. All I have is the fighting technique I through literal desperation. I do not have overwhelming power needed to be called a hero. Technique that any could learn would always be defeated by absolute power.

"But, it looks like this farce will soon end..... Is Mururu fine?"

[Hm?]

If it's her, she should have already noticed.

The atmosphere of the area changed. It was very minute, but there was definitely a change. This was my intuition, that had been trained after getting someone to this world and going through countless fights. Distribution has saved my life countless times already. It's difficult to explain, but I do trust it. All that remains is for me to throw all of that shitty skeleton's attention towards me.

Ah, I really feel like crying, I have already worked so hard to defeat that Demon God after coming to this world. Why do I have two go through so much even after I completed my job?

Sound of wind cutting reached me. No—-

"it's here."

As I jumped backwards, the ground rumbled from the shockwave. The countless zombie corpses flew into the air.

Magic. That too, it is a wind shockwave type that's not visible. This really is a monster that is specialised in stealth moves. My mantle blew from the shockwave, and the mist like miasma distorted.

I'm specialised in close combat, so if I let it attack from long-range, I'll have no chance of winning. Well, it should also understand that as well. There was no surprise or impatience.

I will have to make that shitty skeleton think that it cannot defeat me with just magic. After facing the zombie army, this time I have to overcome invisible magic.

It will be easy, easy. I persuaded myself like that.

[Where did that come from!?]

"Who knows? If Aya or Feirona are here, they could probably sense the flow of magical energy to tell that though."

If a few more of my covenants had been released, I would have become able to do that as well. But that would be difficult in the current situation. I once again looked at the jewel set on the handle of my sword. Just like before, three of them were shining. It would have been so much easier if it actually told me exactly which one of the conditions had been cleared. I grumbled my complaint that I had thought of so many times.

I clicked my tongue then jumped, and hid myself in the hollow of different tree than Mururu.

In my line of vision, there was no distortion in the miasma. The place where the magic was fired was still swaying but that won't be the right direction. While I was thinking that, the tree I was hiding in got broken in half.

Clicking my tongue again, I moved to the shadow of a different tree. Protected by the tree, the shockwave didn't come to me but a sharp ran through my cheek. A fragment of wood had flew which sliced my cheek slightly. I wiped off the flowing blood with the back of my left hand.

"Could you see where that came from?"

[—sorry.]

"Don't mind it, I couldn't either."

It's really pathetic but first we have to find out where our enemy is.

Going by how the tree I was hiding in was broken, it isn't behind us. I peeked out from the cover of the tree and instantly, the tree was snapped. It didn't completely break apart but a chunk of wood the size of my head was blown off. That was proof that this skeleton's magic power wasn't normal. If that had hit me directly, my head would have been blown away completely.

Not just its tail attack, even its magic is top class. That black Orc I fought in that village also used magic but this is on a different level. Even though they're both descendants of the Demon God, howcome they have such a difference in ability? Is it related to their faith and piety to the Demon God maybe? Though there shouldn't be much difference between a pig and a skeleton. Seeing as the pig has a brain at least, it should have more faith right?

Rather than such useless things, let's focus on how to find this shitty skeleton right now.

I couldn't figure out where the attack came from even during the last attack. Though the wind shockwave itself may be invisible, it shouldn't be able to hide the distortions in the mist as well.

"What should I do?"

[You talk as if we have lots of options to decide what to do next.]

"That's true, I guess. As expected of my partner, you sure get to the point."

I was successful in luring it out, now as long as I can make it visible––

While I thought till that, something fell down from the sky. While breaking the branches of trees, a giant 3m bone fell to the ground. It must be light since it was only a bone since it didn't create much of a tremor on falling. Since the shockwave was less, it soon began moving again. It seems it didn't take much damage either. And, after a second, Mururu came down beside me.

"I found it."(mururu)

"So it seems."

As Mururu told me that as if it was perfectly normal, I could only shrug my shoulders. She had already gone into combat mode.

And next, we both jumped out of the cover of the tree. But, as if it was expecting it, it slammed its whiplike tail to the ground. Was it trying to intimidate us? Must be because it became visible after taking damage from falling down.

“The tail..”(mururu)

“Hm?”(renji)

“Sorry. I was unable to destroy its tail.”

“No need to apologise. In fact, I’m glad that you were at least able to find it for me.”

So it was above in the trees. Well, I wouldn’t have realized that. Since it was so big, I had not thought of that possibility. But apparently, since its just bones, its actually pretty light in weight seeing as it didn’t make much of a sound even though it fell from so high.

I wanted to rush in to attack while it was still disoriented but, that tail really is in the way.

“It’s amazing you sensed it there actually.”(renji)

“I was too slow. I had been faster.....”

“I said don’t mind it. You did save me.”

[.....You’re being pretty kind with this beastwoman aren’t you?]

Not really, I think.

The skeleton fully recovered. 8 spiderlike legs and the body of a snake. The swinging whiplike tail mowed down the trees and a head that had a horn like an ogre’s.

“Let’s split up. The one that doesn’t get attacked by the tail will aim to destroy it.”(renji)

“Got it.”

At the same time, I ran towards the right and Mururu ran to the left.

The tail's target was —Mururu. It must have concluded that Mururu was more dangerous than me.

"Ermenhilde, let's do this!"

[Yeah!!]

In place of my jade long sword, a giant hammer appeared in my hands. I held it with both my hands but it wasn't actually that heavy. Resting the hammer on my shoulders, I ran with it. Against bones, shock type weapons work better. Swords are easier swords are easier to use, but hammers have more power. I can break its tail with one strike.

The giant hammer portion was Jade green and its handle was golden. At the end of the handle a Jade jewel was present and the number of gems shining inside it were for. With a speed higher than what I had against zombies, I quickly rushed towards the rear of the skeleton.

The fight between Mururu and the skeleton had already begun. Mururu swiped away the attacks from the tail, that had a speed I could finally follow with my eyes now, with her claws. The matter how strong her claws were she won't be able to take on the attacks from the tail forever. My aim was the root/joint of the tail.

But apparently my intentions were seen through and an invisible magic ball attack was fired towards me. With the help of the distortions in the mist and my own intuition I was able to avoid a direct hit but, my movement speed fell down. I ended up clicking my tongue but I couldn't fall back right now. If I did I would only increase the burden on Mururu. That alone I must avoid. No matter if it was Mururu on me that ran towards it, the skeleton made for a tough opponent.

Avoiding the magic ball, I sweep it away. The number of magic balls it was firing towards me was too great. I felt astonished at the amount of magical energy this thing possessed. Also, due to the magic balls, the zombie corpses that were getting blown here and there were getting in my way. I ended up having to dodge through this surprise barrage of corpses as well.

To be able to face both of us alone, it truly is a descendant of the

Demon God. It's on a completely different level from that Black Orc and ogre. It's a strong enemy I have fought many times alongside Souichi and the others—– with the heroes.

[Are you alright, beast woman!?]

"It's not beast woman, my name is Mururu."

Reacting to Ermenhilde's voice, I also looked towards Mururu. She had fallen back quite a lot from the place she had first started fighting the skeleton. With that small physique of hers, the burden from the attacks of the tail must be more than I thought.

But due to the excessive magic balls, I couldn't close in either. The blood of the zombies blowing apart mixed in with the mist becoming a red smokescreen. And in the middle of that battlefield student 3 m spiderlike, snakelike skeleton.

It's as if I'm facing the devil. I muttered to myself.

"Tch."

It really is very strong. Just because it prefers ambushing and surprise attacks doesn't mean it was weak, I guess.

While facing off against Mururu, it is able to fire so many magic balls towards me as well. There's a chance it might even use a wide range magic if we were to give it the composure to use it. If it actually use that, I'm one thing, but Mururu will definitely not come out of that safe.

We couldn't stop our attack at any cost. But, it was a fact that we couldn't close in on it either. If only another one of my covenants had been released——

While slipping through the rain of magic balls, I ended up thinking of such stupid things. The only one I could clear right now, was the permission/approval from the goddess Astrarea. Just that alone. The other two, I definitely cannot clear right now.

[Tchh—– Renji, the beast woman is in danger!]

"I know!"

Glancing towards Mururu, she had stopped taking on the tail attacks and was now is just dodging them.

Sorry, I could only apologise inside my head. If only I could destroy the tail quickly. But due to facing that zombie army just now, I'm also low on stamina. My right hand's pain has gotten so worse than it has gone numb. Let alone my hammer, I'm not sure if I will be able to swing a sword properly. I'm currently going on solely on adrenaline. Once that wears out, I will become unable to move. Before that, I must defeat the skeleton.

I still continue to dodge the magic bullets. Suddenly a Donsound, different from the magic ball striking the ground, resounded in my ears. When I looked towards Mururu, the skeleton's tail had pierced into a tree.

My thoughts cleared. Without even trying to think what had happened, I quickly rushed towards the skeleton. Putting strength in my arm holding Ermenhilde, at the same time Jade green coloured magical energy gushed out.

In an instant, I was exactly beside the skeleton. I ran,ran and ran——!!

"Go to hell!!"

The Skeleton pulled out its tail from that tree and moved.

But it was too slow.

Before it could react, I brought down the hammer. The Jade green magical energy converged and disappeared right in the middle of the tail.

At the same time, it fired countless magic balls towards the defenceless me who was currently in a swinging motion. I rolled on the ground countless times before finally stopping after hitting a zombie corpse. It reeks of blood, or rather smells of rotting flesh.

But finally, the first step was over. I stood up using the hammer as support. Seeing Mururu's rare worried face, I ended up showing a smile.

"Now the real thing starts."

[Yes, let's do this. We have to quickly defeat it and then search for Aya

and the others as well after all.]

Seriously. This is not even the end. There are so many things I have to do. That alone made me depressed.

[We need to treat your wounds as well.]

“Unfortunately, you can’t do anything about it. I’ll try and have Ms Francesca treat me.”

[……..]

Yeah. My whole body hurts like hell.

Well, this never was an easy opponent from the start. When I looked towards Mururu, she did not have any signs of giving up right now. But, she was breathing heavily. Facing the tail must have taken a toll on her stamina.

Our opponents still has its magic and there is a chance it might have some other trump card as well. It is the type that uses surprise attacks even though it’s so strong. Though it’s not good to be overcautious, it would be stupid to get overconfident of our victory as well.

“Let’s finish this, Ermenhilde, Mururu!”

[Yeah, it’s time to settle this battle.]

“…… Got it.”(Mururu)

Mururu spoke in her usual soft voice. It’s difficult to hear, but it’s very like her.

I felt a bit calmed from that. And fight, win, survive, meet up with Aya and the others, and then head to the capital.

For that––

“I am the one who killed your master!”(Renji)

I don’t know if it understood my words. But my attack, my Jade green magical energy, it should understand who I am. As if it switched its target from Mururu to me, it turned its skeleton face towards me.

Yes, that’s right. I killed him. On that hellish battlefield. In that place

where countless people died, countless lives were lost.

For just a second, I closed my eyes.

Black, Black, Black, Black—— I killed that Demon God, that had the shell of the colour of darkness, with my comrades, together with them.....
With Ermenhilde.

“I will kill you, you fucking skeleton.”

As I opened my eyes, I spoke what I had sworn.

As if howling without vocal cords, it struck it’s spiderlike 8 bone legs on the ground.

Chapter 32 Forest of Rotting Souls (5)

*

Avoiding the strike from the legs of the skeleton, I closed the distance between us along with Mururu. It must be trying to prepare for a big magic attack. After having its tail destroyed, the skeleton's movements have become dull.

The restraining barrage of magic also lessened, and it was just frantically attacking us with its legs. Me aside, there's no way it could strike Mururu with attacks like that. It's eight legs were still in full health but it's rib-like bones were in tatters.

But even then, it wasn't using magic right now. But at the same time, even though it was getting attacked by Mururu so much, it did not leave a gap for me to close in on it. Had my own movements gotten duller? Or was it simply cautious against me? While wielding the hammer, I clicked my tongue for the nth time as my attack was thwarted again.

[What happened, Renji?]

"It's nothing."

My breathing got rougher. Before I knew it I had run out of breath. And to think that I was actually quite proud of my stamina.

While holding the hammer with both hands, I glanced at my right hand. That wound. The fact that I have stopped feeling pain from it means it really must be turning very dangerous. That alone made me feel like giving up, but I couldn't do that just yet. I ended up strangely laughing instead at that. Seriously..... Why do I always get involved in such troublesome things? Do I just have bad luck, or am I being haunted/possessed by something? The fact that I could actually think of something /someone like that, I was left speechless.

"You're worried about me?"(Renji)

[.....Muu]

“I’ll be fine. I hate fighting, but I don’t plan on losing.”

When I said that, I could feel surprise coming from Ermenhilde. This one is so easy to understand. Maybe that’s why, it’s my partner.

I don’t plan on losing. I cannot lose.—– if I did, I will die. I’ll pass on dying inside this remote forest.

“This is why I hate duking it out with monsters.”

[.....Hm?]

“It’s nothing. Let’s go, Ermenhilde—–”

I gave a glance towards Mururu, and without any need to talk, we both charged towards the skeleton together.

The skeleton is definitely concentrating more on me, I can feel it.

I avoided it’s attack that could split opening round. Next, I use my momentum to quickly close in on it but, it used its other leg and swung an attacked towards me. I blocked this attack with the handle of my hammer.

“——Guhh!?”

The force behind it was incredible, at the same time my right hand hurt again. Due to this one attack, I was quickly distanced away from it again. It’s a blessing that I don’t get blown away like from the attack of the tail but, there is simply too much of a gap in the physical strength of monsters and humans. The fact that we still have two win this is exactly what makes this difficult. If we hadn’t been split away from Aya and the others, I wouldn’t have hesitated even a second before running away from an opponent of this level.

While I was taking on it’s attack, Mururu to close the distance with the skeleton and slashed at its body. Those sharp claws shaved off the bone and created cracks on it. We’re definitely, slowly, driving it towards a corner. At a single glance I could tell the amount of wounds had grown on the skeleton’s body.

But even then, somewhere deep in my mind I was still feeling a bit of unease. Will an enemy as strong and fearsome as this go down so easily. There is no way that would happen.

“You okay?”(Mururu)

“yeah, no problem here. You?”

Mururu, who had appeared beside me before I could realise, asked me that.

Her worried gaze as she looked up towards me made me feel a bit awkward/embarrassed.

Mururu as well was starting to run out of breath. On looking closely, I realised that her pure white clothes and hair had become dirty. There were small bleeding wounds here and there on her white skin as well.

I really want this fight to end soon, so that she can take a bath at least. Though, if a guy like me said it, I’ll be treated like a pervert.

As we stood together, the skeleton stored moving and just assessed situation probably because it was cautious of both of us being together. Even when it is about to use magic, it did give off any specific sensation.

“I can still go on.”(Mururu)

“then, I’ll take on its attack. Just like before, you close in and strike at it.”

“….. You sure?”

“Yes, I will be fine.”

She must have realised from the irregularity in my voice. Not just her gaze, even her voice sounded worried. To give her a sense of relief, I gave a smile……. Though I hope my lips aren’t cramping.

It can be helped. I don’t have much experience of giving a smile while being aware of it. I don’t know how she took my smile that I gave while glaring at the skeleton, I did feel that Mururu calmed down a bit.

“Let’s just finish this already. I’m starting to get tired of this.”

“Un.”

[You guys really lack a sense of tension, you know.....]

“As if I’d get tensed from a danger of this level.”

Both me and Mururu gave a slight smile at Ermenhilde’s words.

It’s not like we’re facing some overpowered monster, there is no way I’ll feel tensed. The skeleton is definitely above my skill level, but I know monsters far stronger than this shitty skeleton.

It might sound strange but fighting and extremely strong enemy adds to your experience. And I have definitely fought monsters that are much much stronger than this skeleton. That experience, the fact that I was able to survive against those monsters, is one of the very few weapons I possess.

“Let’s go!”(Renji)

“Yeah.”

In the first place, it’s not like I have any other actions to choose from. I cant avoid this skeleton’s attack, and that skeleton only aims for me. Then, I can only act as bait. It’s not really different from our original strategy. Well, it’s so amateurish that it really can’t be even called a strategy though.

Once again, I ran towards the skeleton with Mururu. As expected aim was still me as those spiderlike legs came towards me. I took on that attack, and averted it. At the same time, Mururu closed in to deal in an attack. But this time the enemy is way of protecting was different. Suddenly, a chill ran down my spine and I had a bad premonition.

“It’s coming!!”

The next moment, the ground beneath Mururu rose and attacked by becoming spears of stone. But as if she had already seen through that attack, Mururu use those protruding Spears as foothold and made a leap. And with that momentum dealt a attack to the skeleton’s head. What agility! So this is what it means to be left speechless.

It's not like she has some kind of cheat like us either. There are few who are able to fight like that even then. Even if she is a beast woman, that was really incredible.

But, I can't just stand here amazed. The magic that attack Mururu activated once again even while it took damage.

"Kuh!?"

[Dodge, Renji!!]

Don't ask the fucking impossible!!

I was able to avoid a direct hit but, my left leg got cut. This is getting really ridiculous, that shitty skeleton. Can go invisible, can use magic, and is also a fucking descendant of the Demon God.

While frowning from the pain in my leg, I avoided the second and the third spear. Just when I was thinking that it was only attacking from below, an invisible magic ball was fired towards me. Unable to sense that surprise attack, I blocked it with my hammer's handle only to get blown away. Fortunately it hit the handle, but I won't get lucky the second time. I quickly stood up, and began running. For the time being, I must keep on moving otherwise I'll get killed by getting pierced by those spears. My newly wounded leg also hurt but I decided to ignore it.

Mururu was moving even better than me but even she was unable to find a chance to close in. Stone spears and invisible magic balls, and even attacks from the eight bone legs. She's facing an even worse situation than me, it's amazing that she is still avoiding any direct hit.

I was a bit bewildered due to the sudden fierce attack but, the enemy doesn't get time to relax either. After all, it had also taken quite a lot of damage. I put more strength in my arm holding the hammer. I must get in an attack somehow. And finish it off.

But, how?

I questioned myself. It's attacks were fierce, I won't be able to slip through all that. Now that my left leg is hurt as well, I am in a situation where even running is difficult. Even though I'll get killed if I stopped, I

need to find a way to kill my opponent as well.

[..... Are you, okay?]

“Do I look like okay?”

Without answering to Ermenhilde’s worries, I questioned it back instead. I only got silence in reply. It’s only normal. After all, my right hand is in a condition where I cant even feel the pain from my own, not to mention the amount of small wounds on my body are only growing in number. And one of the newest wounds on that list is on my legs that is pretty much my lifeline right now. Now I’m not even sure how long I can continue moving around.

It’s now or never right now. But then again, I only have 4 of my covenants released. It’s far from satisfactory. Against a descendant of this level, I’m not sure if this much power would be enough to take it down.

“But, of well, I can’t give either anyway.”

I can’t lose. I must not lose here.

Even in such a deadly situation, I cannot give up. I must face it on. To not get killed, I must kill it first. I must continue fighting.

Even though I hate that style of living. Even though that lifestyle is similar to that of a hero from which I had run away.

I’m being made to take up that style living once again.

It’s the situation Ermenhilde has always been wishing for. But that Ermenhilde was currently being worried for me rather than focusing on the enemy skeleton. If you’re going to proclaim yourself as just a weapon, then don’t hold emotions like that, seriously. That’s why I don’t want to see you as just a weapon. And if you wish for the Hero Yamada Renji, then just put all your trust in me.

But I who never believes in absolute victory––am definitely not a Hero.

Me and Ermenhilde. We are neither a Hero nor a weapon. We’re just a pair of a human who killed a God and his partner who completely trusts in him.

That's all, I want. That's how it should be.

"Now, then...."

I faced the skeleton. His empty eyesocket's glare pierced through me.

In its supposedly non-existent gaze, I could feel it confident of its victory. Even though its just a mere skeleton.

"Don't underestimate me, you fucking skeleton."

The next moment, its left half along with its four legs disappeared in a ray of heat. At the sudden appearance of the intense blinding light, I used my left hand to cover my eyes. That magic attack bore through the ground, split the clouds and pierced the heavens above. In this world where sun had already set, the radiance of midday sun appeared for a few seconds. There was only one in this whole world who could use a magic of that level of power. I did trust in them but.....finally confirming their safety, I truly felt relieved. All that happened in an instant but was definitely real. Having lost its one half, the skeleton fell to the ground. It felt as if it was an animal bowing towards a powerful being. Well, the powerful being here is not me though.

".....What just?"(Mururu)

"As usual, she's really flashy."(renji)

I only replied that to Mururu's mutterings.

I started walking towards the fallen skeleton. It didn't try to attack me with magic any more. You need to concentrate a lot to use magic. Having lost four of its legs, even as a skeleton, it should be difficult for it to concentrate properly.

Feeling not even a shred of sympathy for that skeleton, I went close to its head and raised my hammer.

It's one horned ogre-like skull rose up slightly as it looked straight at me.

"___"

And just like that, without saying anything, I crushed it's head.

No matter how harsh the battle had been, the end is always like this. No sense of excitement, completely anticlimactic. If a movie had such a finale, it would be at the level that the audience would start asking for their money back. This is even more so against monsters. Since we cannot understand each other's words, there is no reason to even ask for their last words.

Remaining in the same pose after ringing my hammer down, I breathed a sigh.

"I'm tired."(Renji)

[That's the first thing you have to say?.....]

"But it's very typical of me to do so right?"

[It's pathetic..... How deplorable.]

Well, sorry.

The hammer disappeared by turning into Jade coloured magical energy, and my body lost all its strength. With the descendant of the Demon God dead, most of my released covenants closed again. It really is pathetic.

"It's over?"(Mururu)

"Yeah."

The skeleton turned to black mud and disappeared into the ground. It's the same as the previous descendants of the Demon God I had fought. After confirming it till the very end, finally I sat down on the ground.

"That attack, was that you Renji?"(Mururu)

"That wasn't me. It was Aya."

On seeing the hole at our camp, I had realised that they were underground but I never would have thought that she would fire magic from underground. There was a chance that either Mururu or me would have also get hit by it and have half of our bodies blown away.

Thinking that made me shudder but, well, all is well that ends well. Let's leave it at that. If I started pondering too much on that, I'll probably

become unable to sleep.

Beside the hole that had been created from the magic attack that had destroyed the skeleton, both me and Mururu sat down. By the way, the size of the hole was 2 m in diameter. Both me and Mururu would have definitely perished if that attack had grazed us even a little..... I should stop thinking about that. It's bad for my heart.

"You okay?"(Renji)

"Just tired."(Mururu)

[..... What are you two, peas in a pod?]

"Really?"(Mururu)

"We aren't that similar."(Renji)

Having run out of things to talk to, we both silently just stared at the hole.

After fighting so hard, almost dying, yet not giving up..... In the end, Aya just ended it all with a surprise attack out of nowhere.

I've always thought about it, somehow I feel like I always end up in such a situation.

Even after fighting so hard, the best portion/role is taken away by Souichi or Aya, or my other comrades. No, well, I'm satisfied as long as I survive though.

While I'm thinking of this, Mururu, who was sitting beside me, looked towards me.

"Was I good?"(Mururu)

"Yeah, you were great. Well done."(Renji)

I lightly patted her head in the same way I used to do Aya and the others back then.

Her smooth and silky hair felt nice.

[What are you doing?]

“Praising her.”(Renji)

[Why?]

“Just felt like it.”

While spent time like that, I heard voices coming from the new hole.

After waiting for a while, finally a slender arm reached out. Mururu went on guard but, I recognised that hand. When I held it and pulled, I saw a familiar face. After seeing that face, I finally, from the bottom of my heart, felt really. Her soft and gentle arm was really girlish. On pulling her out of the hole, she was completely covered in dirt. Not just her clothes, her hair and face as well. And above all, her clothes were sticking to her body very closely. But Ms Francesca has an amazing body, so frankly speaking, it was a very tempting view.

“So you’re safe, Ms Francesca?”(Renji)

Averting my gaze from her dirty, yet alluring figure, I asked her so.

“Ah, Renji-sama!”

“You really should stop with the ‘-sama’ already.”

After pulling Ms Francesca, next, Feirona appeared from the hole. He was the same as Ms Francesca, completely covered in dirt and soil. His clothes were wet as well. Did they fall into some underground water body or something?

“What’s happening?”(Renji)

“Aya-dono is pushing us up with her magic.”

“I see.”

So Aya used flight magic on these two to bring them out of the hole. She really is skilful. Neither of them had any visible wounds either. There just covered in mud. It’s amazing how she was able to make both of them come out of the hole uninjured without hitting any rocks even once when she probably doesn’t even have any source of light underground.

Last one should be Aya herself. As I pulled Feirona out as well, he uses

hands to wipe away the dirt from his hair and clothes. He looks good even while doing something like that. Though, he failed it actually moving the dirt.

"We were worried because you suddenly disappeared, you know."(Renji)

"We got attacked by monsters. And above all, the ground rumbled below us just when we were stuck."(Elf)

"so it seems. It's quite a big hole."

As I said that while recalling the hole at the campground, Ms Francesca became pale faced.

Well, the fact that you survive even after falling from such a hole, I would say that you guys are really lucky.

"And there was a huge army of slimes underground as well. It was great that Aya-sama was with us."(Francesca)

"..... Slimes."

[..... Slimes, eh.]

Both Mururu and Ermenhilde muttered at the same time.

Slimes. Unicellular organisms with jellylike soft bodies. Physical attacks don't affect them much. They are like natural enemies to me and Mururu. It seems Mururu was also aware of that fact has she muttered the name in an annoyed voice.

I as well, do not have good memories regarding slimes either.

Even though it's the lowest class of monster in games, its actually pretty troublesome in the real-life.

Swords and spears to not work but flaming torches or magic attacks are effective. It's body fluids have various effects ranging from poisoning or paralysing enemy to dissolving the armour worn and lowering the person's defence. Due to that, I can't even count how many times I saw hell. Especially, due to the women in our group.

As I recalled the various tragedies brought upon me by slimes, Feirona's

sight turned towards my right arm.

“It seems you guys had your own fair share of trouble as well.”

He said that as he looked at my wounds. As if finally seeing my condition, Ms Francesca gasped as she hid her mouth with her hand.

“Yeah, I came close to dying. I only survived thanks to Mururu.”

“Un.”

Mururu puffed her chest with pride. It was so charming that all three of us started laughing.

Finally, the slender arm appeared from the hole.

“yokkoi, sho!” (T/N: I don’t know how to translate this. It’s basically like a grunting sound or ‘heave-ho’ you do when you do something that strains your body.)

I really don’t think a young girl should be speaking like that.

Aya, who appeared from the hole, was the same as the other two, covered in mud and dirt. The dirt must have stuck due to the liquids from the slimes.

Normally she always looks dignified and has an adult like beauty but her current face was very childish.

“Yo.”(renji)

“.....Eh?”(aya)

“That’s quite the face you have there.”

When I said that, she silently began going back into the hole. She sure is fast, I ended up giving a tsukkomi inside my head. Are you a mole?

“C’mon, come out already. We need to prepare for camp as well.”(renji)

I grabbed her wrist and pulled her out. Without resisting much, Aya came out easily. The reason she felt so light must be because I properly used the edge of the hole as a scaffold and actually used some strength. She came out so easily, it was a bit anticlimactic.

Since it's her, she must have not wanted to be seen covered in dirt so I was sure she would resist. Just l8ike how she looks like an adult, she also despises to be seen when she's weak.

She doesn't want to be always seem like a perfect being but she tries to always show her stronger side, I think.

"You alright?"(renji)

"I'm—-wait, Renji-san, you're injured!?"(aya)

"Yeah. Mururu as well."

Aya started touching my wound without any restraint making it hurt more. I had already done some basic emergency treatment so the wound had already bled so much that the cloth wrapped around it was dyed in red. The wound is not that big but it bled quite a lot. While I was thinking that, suddenly, my legs lost all strength. Huh, without understanding what happened, I fell on my backside.

[Renji?]

Ermenhilde's voice seemed distant. And her voice wasn't worried over the fact that I had fallen but was confused because it didn't understand why I suddenly fell.

Even I, myself, am not sure why this is happening. Just when I was thinking that, this time, my whole body lost strength.

After defeating the skeleton, meeting up with my comrades, I must have relaxed myself too much. How pathetic. To faint from just that much.

I tried apologising but only my lips moved without releasing any sound.

After moving my lips uselessly a few times, even doing that felt annoying.

I closed my eyes.

The world went completely dark.

—-Someone was shaking me. That voice was reverberating like an echo but I can't make out what it means.

I’m tired.

That’s why, I let go of my consciousness.

Chapter 33 Road to the Capital (3)

*

Who was it that was crying?

Due to the major portions of the castle, that was probably carved out from a rock-face, having been destroyed, the ceiling had disappeared and the sky was visible. The sky was a brilliant azure and the sun shined at its brightest. Along with the beautiful wind, it should have made one feel pleasant but it only made me feel more irritated right now.

The sound of swords clashing, magic exploding, the terrain in the surroundings getting destroyed, the cries of those fucking monsters, the desperate voices of my comrades, and the voice right beside me that was calling me——all of them felt irritating.

I won't be able to hear it, like this.

Her last words.

The voice of ___, who was disappearing right inside my embrace.

"Sorry."

When I said that, the girl in my arms laughed as if troubled. Even though red blood was flowing out of her body due to getting slashed by the dark Demon God. But even so, she laughed. So that her last expression was neither crying nor a pained one——but one that was smiling.

It was so painful to look at her like this that I put more strength in my arms holding her.

But even so, as if my comrade beside me couldn't see her in my arms, they shook my shoulders. Called my name in a loud voice.

"Even though I said I'd protect you. Even though——I promised you."

Once again, the girl laughed. This time, with a smile, she shook her head.

Her golden hair swayed, and her jade-green coloured eyes became softer. That expression that she'd show occasionally was so beautiful that if it was not for the fact that she was bleeding out right in my arms, one would have completely fallen in love with her.

But even the red blood, the source of life, only made her look more beautiful.

As I gently caressed her cheek, her lips moved slightly. But I heard no words. Only, her lips moved.

Aah, why am I always like this? Unable to protect those who I really want to. Always getting protected by others, the weakest Hero. A failure who can't utilise his own power properly. Why? Why? Why? —— Why did I ask for this kind of power? If it was going to be this saddening, if it was going to be this painful.....

"__"

In memories, a noise disrupted her words. I can't recall it. Her last words.

An immense magic shook the world. The slash from the Brave and the Demonic Sword user, the breath from the Ancient Dragon, the attack from the Demon Lord; turned the castle of the Demon God into rubble.

Everyone is fighting hard, working together. They are trying to defeat the enemy of the world. Even then I, the one who holds the weapon to defeat that enemy held not the weapon but her instead.

I held her small, soft, blood-stained, warm hand. Even though this wasn't the first time I did so, it felt like it was.

It felt as if it was not ___'s hand anymore, and as if to not forget that sensation, I put it near my cheek.

"You'll get dirty."

"Like I care. It's your blood."

“.....As usual, you’re such a fool.”

Yeah, that’s right. I’m a fool. An utter fool. An idiot who can’t protect anything he wants to. And even then, I still wish to protect her.....a hopeless, irredeemable fool.

And she said ____ to me. Because I was like this, she said ____ to me. That’s why I swore that I won’t change the way I live.

Before my comrades, before the world, before the Demon God, I chose this girl in front of me.

And, that girl looked at me with a smile.

“Don’t cry.”

At her voice, I finally realized who was crying.

It was me. I was the one who was crying.

“.....Don’t cry, idiot.”

Even though she’s about to die, ____’s voice was gentle and warm as always. Her hand holding me started losing strength so I put more strength in my hand and held her even more tightly. Even though I’m holding her so tight that it should be painful, let alone cry in pain, ____ didn’t even show a change in her expression.

She simply, kept on looking at me with a smile.

“I, rather than your crying face.....like your smiling face more.”

She laughed. With a smile, the smile I loved, she told that to me.

Till the very end, with a smile. With a dazzling, almost painful to watch, smile.

“That’s why, don’t cry.”

That’s why, I made a promise.

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When I opened my eyes, a familiar ceiling entered my view. A magnificent chandelier hung on the wooden ceiling. Moving my head to look to the side, very expensive, thick curtains hung over the glass windows.

A fire seemed to be burning in the fireplace as the room was perfectly warm. Judging by the water drops forming on the window, it should be pretty cold outside.

Looking back towards the ceiling again, I gave a sigh.

“Ermenhilde?”

I called but there was no answer. It wasn’t by my side it seems making me sigh again.

I am pretty certain that I know where I am right now. This place––this room is the one that had been allotted to me. After being summoned here, I resided in this room while I learnt more about this world. Whether it be the alignment of the furniture or the view from the window, both felt nostalgic. As the tension in my body left, I relaxed into my bed again.

But, I can’t understand how I’m here. After the battle in that forest..... whatever happened to that shitty Skeleton?

“__”

When I tried to get up, a pain ran through my right arm. On looking I realized that it had been bandaged. Oh right, I had taken quite a lot of damage from that skeleton.

After that, after meeting up with Aya and others––I have not a single bit of memory. I must have stayed fainted for the whole time. I recalled that my condition headed towards the worse after getting my right arm damaged. I must have been poisoned back then as well. It must be due to that poison that my body feels so sluggish. Even moving a little feels like a pain.

While confirming the condition of my body, I felt amazed that I actually survived after all that. Let alone Ms Francesca, even Aya or Feirona cannot use detoxifying magic. Apparently you cannot detoxify a poison if you don't understand its composition perfectly. No matter how much of a genius magician Aya is, she's still only 18. On top of that, in a world like this where science is very lacking in progress, there's no way they could learn about poisons and its composition. A poison from a descendant of the Demon God wouldn't have any antidote easily available either. Obviously, unlike games, this world doesn't have a single antidote for all kinds of poisoning.

Thus, only Yayoi-chan and one more has the ability in this whole world to nullify the Demon God's poison. If this really is the Imnesia Royal Castle as I think it is, then I must have been cured by the Witch of the Capital.

"yawn.."

While I kept thinking of such things, I ended up yawning while feeling sleepy. Is body still tired or have I simply overslept and still want to sleep? I don't even know the current situation but since I wasn't woken up means that it must not be an emergency. While I tried to keep my consciousness as I felt more sleepy, finally I realized that someone else was also in the room.

That certain black haired person was currently sleeping while sitting on a chair and using her hand on the table in front of her as a pillow. I could easily recognise that face.

"Oi, Aya."

I called out but there was no response. She must be in deep sleep. Sleeping in that pose is gonna make her body hurt all over later though, I think.

After trying to call her a few more times, I gave up on waking her. Well, the room is warm, she won't catch a cold at least. Though I feel like I'll get scolded for looking at her sleeping face later though. Well, I'll deal with that when it comes. Since I had nothing else to look at, I decided to

observe her sleeping face. Since she's always acting uptight and dignified, such moments are precious. I'll tease her later.

Her eyelids and her small shoulders moved as she breathed. Her expression was also gentler suitable of her age. Her usual expression also suits her but her current expression had a charm of its own. She's called an honour student back at the academy but I wonder if she sleeps through her classes or not. I wonder how many boys have seen her face like this.

But soon I got bored of that as well and I once again started looking outside the window. How should I say this, I am too used to seeing her sleep like this. After all she always slept before me when we were journeying.

Since it still hurts to move my body, I'll have to just laze around like this.

"....."

Royal capital Imnesia. Located at the centre of the continent, it's the largest city. With the 4 great cities in every direction, this is the capital where the king lives.

From the forest of rotting souls, where my memories ended, it should have still taken 5 days even with horses to get here. It's really amazing I survived that long of a journey while being poisoned.

Suddenly, the door was knocked. Without waiting for a reply, the door was opened and a familiar woman's face peeked in.

"Ah, so you're awake."

As if she was here just to chat, she spoke. I'm an injured guy here who had fainted due to my wounds you know. Well, if I were to say that, it will not end well for me, in fact I'll probably get scolded for making Aya and the others worry or something like that.

Somehow, I can never win with words against her. I have lost so many times that I have become consciously aware of that fact that I'll lose an argument.

While playing with her flaxen hair drooping from her shoulders, she slowly closed the door back. To make sure that Aya didn't wake up, I didn't even hear a small sound. She really is skilled.

She wore a magician like robe and a had glasses, that were rare in this world. Her slightly reddish eyes that showed her strong will looked directly at me without wavering. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who thinks that her gaze is scary. As she walked over the carpet without making even a single sound, she really did give off the feeling of a Witch seen in legends and fables. Though, once again, I was perfectly aware of what was waiting for me if I said that out loud.

Since it'd be weird to stay lying down like this, I tried to get up when her gaze seemed to have become slightly warmer. Was she worried about me?

Probably, I think. Her gaze and presence was scary but I know that this woman isn't really that cold. She must have been worried about me, I think. But well, the fact that she's here means that my deductions weren't wrong. I ended up sighing again.

"So we really are at the Imnesia Castle?"(renji)

"Yes. You were brought in with incredible wounds, Yamada-kun."

While saying that, the Witch of the capital slightly caressed the sleeping Aya's hair.

——Utano-san.

Utano-san's finger must have felt nice since Aya's sleeping expression felt even gentler. They looked so much like a family that I felt pleasant as well. And, though it was easy to understand, Aya did have affection for Utano-san like she was her mother. Whenever she had trouble she'd go to Utano-san as well. I think she does so even now. I felt a bit jealous of their relationship to be honest.

Having realized my gaze, Utano-san looked at me with a teasing gaze.

"If you look at a girl's sleeping face so seriously, you'll be treated as a pervert you know?"

“How rude. I wasn’t looking that seriously.”

“fufu. No matter what Yamada-kun is thinking, this girl wouldn’t really mind it though.”

As she kept on caressing Aya’s hair, her hand then reached Aya’s cheek. As if it tickled, Aya shrunk back from it. It was as if she was a cat.

“After all, her special person saw her sleeping face. That’s very important you know.”(utanoO

“.....”

I could only avert my gaze from Utano-san who said that.

I could also predict what she’d say next. That’s why I simply decided to look out of the window instead. Ahh, where the hell is Ermenhilde?

“Treasure them properly.”(utano)

“I do. In my own way, that is.”

Her gaze cold and sharp and turned towards me. But still, I can’t help it.

It’s very vague what Aya and I want from each other. If I tried to change that, I would only fail. Probably.

“It seems even after a year, your incompetence hasn’t changed at all.”(utano)

“.....so harsh. I’m not trying to be incompetent you know?”

“If it was me, I’d take a more straight approach.”

“Well, that’s how you always are after all.”

I’m, unlike you, not strong enough to believe in myself. Aya is.....I don’t know how she thinks.

Taking a straight approach and then magnificently failing, it’s not a laughing matter at all. Well, that’s no more than an excuse. In fact, it’s exactly how Utano-san said that I was incompetent. I know Aya’s feelings towards me. But, I’m still avoiding it.

If Aya doesn’t know what she seeks from me, then we simply have to

look for it together. She's still 18yrs old, she was just a 16 yrd old child when she developed those feelings. It's wrong to ask for an answer to such a thing from a child like her. But still, I did so. And I'm getting spoiled by her. Even though my answer.....had already appeared an year ago.

"She was crying after you fainted you know?"(utano)

"I see."

"To make a girl cry. You're the worst."

"I know."

When I shrugged my shoulders, she gave a sigh.

Am I the worst because I'm simply weak or because I still haven't accepted Aya? It's probably both. Yeah, I'm definitely incompetent. Taking a damage from a different person than the usual Ermenhilde, I hung my head in shame.

"And, I as well———"(utano)

"Hm?"

Her next words were in such a small voice that I couldn't hear it clearly.

I looked at her so that she could repeat it but she simply looked at me with the cold eyes of the great Witch.

"So I heard you rampaged in the forest of rotting souls?"(utano)

"No, I simply ran all over the place from monsters. It was Aya who dealt the finishing blow."

"What's that? That's completely different from what I heard."

Apparently she wasn't going to repeat what she had said before so I simply decided to answer her next question.

When I did, she laughed while hiding her mouth. That gesture was very womanly, in a completely different sense from Aya or Miss Francesca. She loses to both of them in the chest department but she's definitely an adult.

“It’s the truth though.”(renji)

“It may be to you but it seemed different to Aya though. Well, people do glorify every action of the person they like after all.”

“in the first place, Aya wasn’t even there though.”

I recalled that shitty skeleton. Aya wasn’t there but it was definitely Aya who killed it. The high output bombardment that she fired from underground had blown half of that demon away.

Seeing an attack like that really makes me realize how weak I really am once again. She’s intelligent, beautiful, and has a good personality as well. The only thing I surpass Aya in is age. What a pitiful thing it is.

“Then, all the more so. To this child, you are that special.”(utano)

“That’s troublesome in its own way though. I’m not a special person after all.”

While we talked in low voice so as to not wake AYa up, we looked at her sleeping face again.

“So, why am I here?”(renji)

“You don’t remember?”

“Unfortunately, I have no memories after fighting the demon in the forest.”

“My oh my. It seems you even missed Aya’s crying face.”

“To be honest I’m glad I didn’t see that though.”

If I saw something like that, I’ll be filled with a guilty conscience.

Crying faces are one thing—–I really don’t want to see. It’s fine if they are tears of happiness though. But if I don’t want to see tears of sadness……at all.

“I’m a crybaby as well after all. If I see someone crying, I’ll start to tear up as well.”(renji)

“That’s true.”

Enough of that, I averted my face to run from her gaze. Why is it that only at such times she shows a gentle expression? I really am not good with dealing with Utano-san. She's fun to talk to but I feel as if she can see through my inner thoughts sometimes.

"Yui carried you all the way here from the forest."(utano)

"Yui-chan did?"

I ended up asking again due to hearing a familiar name.

Yui-chan. Hiyuu Yui. One of the 13 summoned, the same as us. A girl that tames monsters. I didn't know where she was currently but was she luckily near the forest?

"She was actually in the Elfreim continent but apparently Koutarou-kun brought her here. He had seen a future where you would die it seems. You should be sure to thank both of them."(utano)

Where do I even start with this? I'm already surprised with Yui-chan and Koutarou's names coming up and now you're telling me that I was predicted to be dead?.....That bastard Koutarou, if he saw something like that, tell that to me directly!

Well, I'm also at fault since I was hiding where I was living I guess.

Why is it that everytime he sees me in a future, I'm about to die? Am I that weak? I do consider myself to be stronger than the normal adventurers of this world but is that also wrong? I really feel like crying now.

Seeing me like that, Utano-san started laughing again. Aya kept on sleeping as usual though.

"Yui-chan and Koutarou.....are you trying to gather everyone up in the capital?"(renji)

"Well, now. The event is close but I have no intention of doing that."

Saying that 'she' has no intention to do so means that someone else is planning to do so from the dark.

For example, the person who created this world, or maybe it's just some

absurd fate working. Well, that person is not a human but a goddess though. I hope that my intuition telling me that another problem is coming is really wrong. Everything that she brings up is in a different level of trouble. On top of that, it's always concerned with me somehow. Am I the only one who thinks that she's just messing around with me now?

As if she had read my thoughts, Utano-san also gave an amused smile.

"Work hard."(utano)

"I refuse. I worked hard enough for my whole life on that day an year ago."

"That's irrelevant. She's a goddess, and it's always your duty to take her requests."

What kind of logic is that?! That's messed up. I have to deal with that woman for my whole life?

Ignoring me who dropped his shoulders in dissapointment, Utano-san stood up.

"But certainly, it seems everyone is gathering together. It's as if some kind of fate is working at it."(utano)

"Oh please no. The Demon God is dead. The most troublesome thing is gone.....i just don't want anymore fighting."

"I agree. I have a lot of things I have to do in this country."

Her tone, was even deeper than before when she said those last words. She must be feeling depressed while thinking about all the work she has.

It doesn't show much on her expression usually but, only at times like these she's easy to understand.

".....you seem to be working hard as well, with all sorts of things."(renji)

"Yes, all thanks to a certain someone quickly disappearing out of nowhere."

I decided to ignore that and look at Aya's sleeping face instead.

I really do feel sorry about it. For running away from all the trouble, from Aya and for hiding myself my other comrades……and to have left everything to Utano-san.

But even then, Utano-san never seriously blamed me for anything and still talk to me like back then. I wonder if this woman knows how happy that makes me. Even though I'd be in no position to refute her no matter what she says to me.

"fufu, for the time being, first heal your wounds. It's safe here after all."(utano)

"Oh please, can't I at least move to an inn in the town instead?"

If I were to stay here, I'll start meeting all sorts of people that know me. How will I even face them after hiding from them for one whole year?

Even while knowing that, Utano-san's gaze was cold. Extremely cold—– an Absolute zero level gaze was sent towards me.

"That's impossible. Everyone already knows that you're here."(utano)

"—-Wha?!"

"Eru is the insurance. Without her, you won't slip out of the castle either. Am I right?"

I looked at Utano-san blackly.

And she looked at me with a smile of a child that just succeeded in her prank. Though it was rare expression from her, I could only feel chills from it.

"Utano-san, may I ask an abrupt question?"

"What is it, Yamada-kun?"

"I, how long was I……asleep I wonder?" (T/N: it's difficult in english but basically Renji is talking in a very polite manner to her.)

"Today would be the fifth day, so basically around 100 hours I guess?"

I covered my face with my left hand. No wonder my body feels so

sluggish. I must have been rushed to the capital but I didn't think I had been asleep for so long.

"Aya's here so what about them.....Feirona and the others?"(renji)

"I met them. A noble daughter, an elf, and a beast woman. You're once again travelling with very interesting people, eh?"

"So they were safe. That's good....."

That's a relief. I did think that they'd be safe considering Aya's here but even I would get worried seeing it's been 5 days already.

They're probably not in the castle so they must be in the town, resting in an inn. If I am able to slip out later, I should go meet them. Well, first I'll have to find which inn they're staying inn though.

"You can be relieved. I'll send a messenger by tomorrow and invite them to the castle later."(utano)

"Ah, I see."

She really can read minds, right? Or am I simply that easy to read? I hope it's the former.

"But even still, you've brought something troublesome again with you."(utano)

"Hm?"

From her pocket, she brought out a black crystal. I have no memory of this but I doubt its something good. Not to mention colour—it made me recall that goddamn fucking monster. Probably because I dreamt of the past just now, I felt even worse than before. From just the looks, it looks like a pretty crystal ore that hasn't been shaped yet.

"And what's that?"(renji)

"It's what the beast woman called Mururu brought from the Elfreim continent."

".....Mururu did?"

Or rather, so she's from the Elfreim continent. How did she manage to

get a ship needed to cross over to this continent? Especially how she didn't even know how money worked.

Well, I should ask that the next time we meet. I can't find an answer like this.

"Then, that's the content of the request from the Spirit God?"(renji)

"Oh my. You didn't know that?"

"Because she refused to show it to anyone but Utano-san. And I felt that it'd be better to open it with you as well."

Though in truth, I just wanted to avoid any responsibility. But let's not tell her that. Honesty may be a virtue but too much of honesty is just foolish.

"So, what is it?"(renji)

"A fragment of the Demon God's heart."

Ah, so that's why I felt so sick suddenly. Even after hearing that, I didn't feel disturbed in the slightest. In fact, I feel more satisfied. If Ermenhilde was with me, I would have smashed it to pieces. Utano-san said that she took Ermenhilde so that I don't run away but probably this was the main reason. To have thought so far, so annoying.

"Is the Demon God reviving?"(renji)

"No, we won't let it."

I recalled what that demon said back at the Magic CIty.

But Utano-san denied it strongly. It really encouraged me as well.

"That's the reason why we exist here, Yamada-kun."

Away from the window, she said that while sitting at the side of the bed. Her reddish black eyes looked at me from an even closer distance than before.

Too close, or am I the only one who is thinking that.

"Aya still hasn't woken up?"(renji)

Averting my gaze, I looked at Aya.

No matter how much we talked she showed no signs of waking up.

“Yes, I made her sleep with magic after all.”(utano)

“Wha——-”

‘What are you saying?’ Before I could say that, my lips were blocked. With soft lips of a woman’s.

It was just a peck, like a child’s kiss. That too, only lasted an instant before she moved away. But even then, it was sweet and smelled nice.

When I opened my eyes, that I had closed who knows when, my gaze met Utano-san’s slightly moist gaze. That also only lasted an instant. She quickly stood back up again and quickly moved towards the door. She must be embarrassed. Even though she’s usually assertive, in the end, her heart is still that of an innocent child’s. It seems that hasn’t changed either.

“Then, I’ll leave you take care of Aya, Yamada-kun.”

She snapped her fingers.

When she did, as if nothing had happened, Aya lifted up her sleepy body. Since she was sleeping on the table, she stretched her body while sitting with sleepy eyes.

“Good Morning, Aya.”(utano)

“Eh, ah—-Yuu.....”

At that, she finally realized that I was awake and her body hardened up. Her expression changed into various ones, one by one. I can never get bored of this no matter how many times I see it. Now if I were to say that I saw your sleeping face right now, I wonder what kind of face she’d make?

“I’ll go prepare a meal, you’re hungry right?”(utano)

And the woman who left only problems behind her left the room after saying just that.

Chapter 34 Reunion (1)

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"Renji-san, are you fine now?"(aya)

"Hm, yeah. My body hurts a bit due to sleeping too much though."

According to Utano-san, I slept for full 5 days. It's been a long time since I slept for so long continuously. I guess even I'll get tired after walking continuously till the Forest of Rotting souls and then fighting a Demon God's descendant. Well, I'm already very lucky to have survived all that to be honest.

"Also, I'm hungry."(renji)

"fufu. Even though you almost died, you're already energetic eh?"(aya)

"Cause I didn't die in the end."

When I said that, Aya laughed amusingly. Seeing her smile, I also started laughing with her.

"Did I make you worry?"(renji)

"Yes, very much so. Francesca-senpai and the others were very worried as well."

"I see."

Aya brought a chair and sat down near my bed. The way she sat was, in a sense, in an even more dignified manner than Utano-san. I won't say that out loud though. Even walls have ears after all.

Aya's tone was a bit angry, but her expression was so gentle that I didn't feel scared at all. I wonder if she herself knows that? I doubt she does.

"To fall asleep in my room, you really must have been worried a lot, I guess."(renji)

“.....mouu, please forget that.”

Blushing a little, she glared at me. Normally it would be scary but right now, it only feels cute. When I kept on staring at her face, she ended up averting her face.

“It would be such a waste to forget that.”(renji)

“There’s no such thing!”

When she spoke angrily and I shrugged my shoulders at it, my right arm pained again slightly. No, the wound has healed but, a little of the Demon God’s poison is still remaining probably.

“Are you really okay?”(aya)

“As long as Aya doesn’t shout at me, yeah.”

“uu..”

When I gave a stifled laughter, Aya curled up her body. It’s because you act like that, I feel like teasing you more you know? Due to the gap between this and the way she acts normally, well, my teasing nature gets awakened.

Even I myself think that its very childish of me to do so. Like, what the hell am I doing? But, oh well, I guess it would be imprudent to continue any further right now .

If I am to tease someone who was worried for me, I should at least wait till I’m back to full health again. Even I have tended to my injured comrades countless times. At those times, its best to always be energetic, I know.

“You’re always teasing me.”(aya)

“Because I get really amusing reactions when I do so.”

“Haah.....you’re treating me as a child.”

“Because you still are a child.”

“I’m already 18 yrs old.”

“And I’m 28.”

When I said that, she pouted like a child to protest against me. That's exactly why you're still a child. But if I pointed that out, she'll fix her expression which would be a waste so I didn't.

We continued conversing like that when,

"Oh right, where's Ermenhilde?"

".....Eru is probably with Yui or that idiot, I think."(aya)

When I changed the topic, she sighed.

Idiot—-probably means Koutarou. Aya and Koutarou don't get along much. Well, they don't hate each other or anything, they simply quarrel with each other too much. That's because Aya uses magic by using her mind/thinking with her head whereas Koutarou weaves/creates magic with pure sense/intuition. One being a genius and one who depends on pure instinct, they simply are unable to understand each others magic. That's why they end up quarrelling.

Even after countless times I have mediated their fights, they still haven't stopped.

"It was Koutarou who came to save me because he saw a future of me dying you know?"

"No such thing."

"When I tried to defend Koutarou, Aya pouted again.

"If he saw a future of Renji-san dying, he should have quickly told it to us. If he had, we would have taken Souichi and Yayoi with us as well."(aya)

"That won't do. Those two have their own things to do as well."

To be honest, if it were upto me, I'd have Aya live as a student at Magic City as well but it's useless to say that now.

"He's always putting up airs, over exaggerating things.....that's why I don't like him."(aya)

"Please try to get along with him more."

“I’ll try to.”

Well, even I think that he should have told me such a future earlier though. He saw my death after all, my death! I don’t want to die yet, you know? I have lots of things I want to do, things I have to finish. There’s no way I’ll accept dying in that remote forest.

I’m pretty sure he has already disappeared but next time I meet him, I’m definitely going to complain about this. Also, I have to thank him for saving me as well. That chunnibyou wannabe is weak to such things after all. I’m gonna tease him to my heart’s content.

“Oh right, is Yui-chan also in the capital?”(renji)

“Yes. She was the one who carried you here from the forest on her Fafnir. She should be at the training grounds right now.”

Saying that, Aya stood up and opened the curtains. I also came closer to the window and looked outside. The training grounds were perfectly visible from this window. There a giant crimson dragon was currently resting its wings. It was Yui-chan’s third contracted beast, the Ancient Dragon-Fafnir. Just like an year ago, it always looked strong and cool. Every man admires dragons after all, yeah. We had the dragon lend us its back to move quickly to different places and also had the help from its breath attacks during battles countless times.

“Oh, there’s Fafnir.....so that means..”

Saying till that, a 15cm tall humanoid with wings came towards the window we were looking through—a fairy. When I had asked sometime before if she didn’t feel cold flying around wearing just that white dress, apparently, the wind spirits took care of that for her. Truly convenient.

“__, ____-”

Since I closed the window, I can’t hear what she’s saying but it seems she hasn’t realized that so is still continuing to talk. When I finally laughed at her, she finally realized and started beating on the window. She’s the same as well it seems.

“Don’t break the glass, will you?”(renji)

“How rude. Even though I came here to greet you, you laughed at me.”(fairy)

“It’s your fault to start talking even though the window was closed. You should have realized that earlier.”

“uu––well, that’s true as well.––”

Since she’s mumbling in a small voice I can’t hear her properly. Since her body was small, her volume was low as well.

“What did you say?”(renji)

“Shut up. Idiot! Die with your incompetence!”

“I am not gonna die that easily.”

And what the hell, she’s calling me the same thing as Utano-san. Even I’ll get hurt a bit now. I’m not that incompetent, probably. Even like this, I still try to live as bravely as possible.

“Anastasia, did you see Ermenhilde?”(renji)

“Wha? What, you prefer that medal woman over me?”

“What is wrong with your brain? I can’t calm down without Ermenhilde by my side that’s all.”

But she still looked at me with a suspicious gaze. Really, what goes on inside her head?

Fairy Anastasia. She’s the queen of all fairies that reside in the forest of the World Tree in Elfreim. She’s a user of Spirit magic and in terms of usability of magic, she even surpasses Aya in my opinion. Though I wonder if that’s simply because she’s a fairy or because this nagging chibikko(small kid/brat) is actually skilled on her own.....It’s probably the former.

I wonder what she was thinking right now after I asked about Ermenhilde since the Fairy queen flew away from the window and glided in the air. She’s really skilful. I recalled that I had tried flying using spirit magic many times myself but I couldn’t fly as well as Anastasia. And then I was made a fool of as well. I’ll ask her again and take revenge this time.

“fuun. You have it hard as well, Aya.”(fairy)

“Not really. This fun in its own you know.(aya)

“Yuuko as well, without him knowing.....you’re such a sinful man, Renji”(fairy)

“In Utano-san’s case, I’m more of a victim in my opinion.”(renji)

“.....”

But, for some reason, I ended up getting a cold glare from Aya instead. Even the presence beside me became colder.

“What did you do to Yuuko-san?”(aya)

“Why am I being treated as the wrong-doer!?”

To be looked so suspiciously by Aya.....I’m so sad. But in truth, earlier, how should I call it, that was a surprise attack by her. In any case, I am not at fault in anyway I think. Or maybe I am at fault for not being clear even now?

Well, I guess its always the man who’s at fault in such cases. Yeah.

“It comes to him as a habit, doesn’t it?”(fairy)

“Shut up, chibikko.”

“nuu. You’re calling me like that again, you incompetent!.”

Saying that, she climbed on my right shoulder. The weight I felt made me nostalgic and I ended up smiling a little.

“Where’s Yui-chan?”(renji)

“With Faf’. ‘Knight’ is swinging swords with Yuuta.”(fairy)

“With Kuuki eh——-”

I’ll have to go meet him as well. Kuuki Yuuta. The [Knight of the Goddess], one of the heroes affiliated with the Knights Order of the country. And ‘Knight’ was the first contracted monster of Yui-chan, a Phantom Knight. He’s called ‘Knight’ because he’s a knight. Utano-san was the one who named him. Don’t try to think too much about it. It’s

useless to make a retort.

But still, I sure hear a lot of my comrades names just by coming to the capital. That made me feel——very weird kinds of unclear emotions, making me scratch my head.

“You’ll catch a cold so I’ll close the window again, okay?”(aya)

“Yeah.”

“My oh my. What devotion! You’ll definitely become a good wife, Aya.”(fairy)

“———!”

When Anastasia teased her like that, she silently, but instantly tried to grab the fairy. Aya really has a low boiling point in front of her comrades it seems.

It wasn’t her aim, but since Anastasia was on my shoulder, it ended up with her jumping at me. Normally I’d just hold her back easily but I really didn’t have any strength on me right now. I tried but my legs soon gave up as I fell. I also felt the actual culprit move away from my shoulder as well.

“Oh!”

“EH!?”

Just like that, I fell down along with Aya. I fell with my back towards the bed and Aya fell right in my arms. Depending on how you look, it would seem as if I was passionately hugging Aya I guess.

“Oho.”(fairy)

“Don’t tease her too much. Even after all the teasing, she still hasn’t gotten used to it after all.”(renji)

“I know.”(fairy)

Why was she giving me thumbs up, this idiot fairy queen.

“You okay?”(renji)

I called to the girl in my arms but I got no response. When I bent my

neck below to see her, only her glossy black hair came into my view. She must be putting a lot of time in grooming her hair. It even smelled really nice as well. But as you'd expect, I won't harbour wicked thoughts for a girl who feels more like a daughter.

"Aya?"(renji)

"....."

When I spoke, as gently as I could, she put her hand on my chest. She held my shirt, and gripped it very tightly.

As I wondered about what emotions were running through her——I looked above to see the culprit behind this situation, the fairy queen flying around the room grinning while looking at us. How can one be so carefree? As expected of prank-loving fairies I guess? And she's their queen to top it off.

Giving a sigh, I released strength from my body. After 5 days of only sleeping, I lack all energy.

"C'mon, don't cry. I'm still alive right?"(renji)

Her shoulders were slightly trembling.

But I could only caressed her head gently while combing through her hair. I was the one who made her worry and afraid. She said it lightly but she must have been really worried when I was unconscious. I can understand. I was also always anxious and worried whenever I was looking after an injured comrade. I know what she's feeling all too well.

And I also know that you alone cannot deal with those emotions. So all I could do was caress her head to calm her. Just like back then.....just like 'her' who held me tightly and caressed me.

"You're a crybaby as usual."(fairy)

"More than 50% is your fault here, you know?"(renji)

"I wonder?"

Saying that, as if she had read my mind, she looked at me. Well, I know. The one who's at fault the most is me who almost died. It's me who made

them all worry so much. That's why I could only try and comfort Aya. Even though I haven't done anything for this girl. Even though I haven't even answered back to her feelings. But even so, I end up accepting Aya like this. This, definitely is my fault. I know that.

After caressing her head for a little while, Aya's shoulders started to tremble lesser and lesser. Utano-san did say that 'take care of Aya' but, I guess, she expected even this to happen. While I was thinking of that, one of the culprits(Anastasia) hit my head. Since she's small it doesn't hurt but it did surprise me.

"That was a minus."(fairy)

"……What was?"*(renji)

"You shouldn't think of other women while embracing a girl!"

Can read minds as well? I ended up retorting like that.

"I wasn't really, though."(renji)

"Should I tell about this to Eru and Yuuko later then?"

"Fine, fine."

Maybe she didn't like my answer, she hit my head again. It was a fist this time. Well, that doesn't really hurt either though.

"Even though you abandoned us for a whole year; how about showing some gratitude towards me who let you off the hook with just this much?"(fairy)

"Yeah, yeah."

"……Seriously. you're such a tsundere."

"That usage is definitely, without a doubt, wrong!"

There's no 'tsun' in me. In the first place, a male tsundere just sounds creepy.

(T/N: If you don't know what a tsundere is, tho it's pretty much impossible if you're reading LNs and WNs and still don't know that, but even so if you don't, just google it. I'm pretty sure you'll get wiki pages

explaining in detail what a tsundere is :P)

"Ermenhilde also uses such weird words at times but who the hell is teaching you guys all this stuff?"(renji)

"Koutarou, obviously?"

That idiot, I'm definitely going to make him cry later. Though I do have to thank him for saving me, that's a different thing altogether.

Deciding that in my heart, I lifted Aya from her shoulders and sat down on the bed with her. It ended up with her technically sitting on my lap but Aya didn't seem to have any complaints about that. To be honest, I'd be happier if she'd move already. As usual, she rested her head on my chest. She smells temptingly nice, really.

"A....Aya?"(renji)

"What is it?"

It would seem that she had cried out completely already as her voice was back to normal. I gave a sigh of relief at that.

"Please get down off me already."(renji)

"It's amazing you could even say that. I'm actually impressed."(fairy)

I ignored the fairy speaking from above for now. Or rather, at least half of this is your fault, this situation.

But seriously, how did it end up like this? I ended up giving a wry smile. I was the one at fault. No matter how I try to gloss over it, the fact doesn't change that my weakness made them worry so much.

"I really made you worry, didn't I?"(renji)

"Very much so."(aya)

"I see."

The same conversation we just a while ago. But this time, Aya was crying. But for some reason, I don't feel that bad inside. There's no way I would when it was a beauty who was worried for me and crying over me.

I see. I whispered that once again and looked towards Anastasia.

“I made you worried as well?”(renji)

“Yes, very much. I was incredibly, worried for you.”

“As usual you exaggerate everything, don’t you?”

“As usual your treatment of me is different from others as well, isn’t it!?”

“This much is more than enough for you.”

As I talked with Anastasia, Aya, in my embrace, trembled her shoulders. But this time I didn’t hear her sobbing but heard her stiffled laughter.

“Thank you. For crying for me.”(renji)

“––Yes.”

From within my embrace, Aya smoothly slipped out. Even though she had been crying till now, she was surprisingly nimble with her feet.

In exchange, Anastasia came back to sit on my right shoulder.

“If Renji-san won’t cry, I’ll cry for you as well.”(aya)

“I see.”

“.....That’s why, if you even slightly think that that is not good, please don’t make me cry anymore.”

With reddened eyes, but with a smile, she said that to me.

“Was that a confession?”(fairy)

“Well, I wonder?”(renji)

“Something like that?”(aya)

As we both answered at the same time, all 3 of us started laughing.

Were both the correct answer? Or were they both wrong?

As we talked about things that I wasn’t sure even held any meaning, the door was knocked.

“I brought food, Yamada-kun.”

Utano-san came in. In both of her hands were trays with different food

arranged.

How the hell did she even knock the door then?

“Oh? Anastasia, you were here as well?”(yuuko)

“Yes! Yuuko, where’s my portion?”9fairy)

“I’ll share mine with you.”

“This why I love you, Yuuko!”

To get lured in by food, she sure is selfish. As expected of a fairy, I guess.

As my right shoulder became lighter, I gave a sigh. As my gaze connected with Aya’s, we both gave a smile.

“Did you have him spoil you well?”(yuuko)

“___”

Instantly, Aya’s face turned red. She hid her face but even she was red to nape of her neck and the tip of her ears.

As usual, she’s weak to unexpected things.

“Now then, let’s eat shall we?”(renji)

At times like these, it’s best to act as if I didn’t notice and wait for the storm to pass. I don’t think that’s a mistake either. Seeing me like that, Utano-san looked at me for a second and gave a sigh.

“Don’t you know? Every time you sigh, you let your happiness run away apparently.”(renji)

“It’s fine. I’ve already found/caught my happiness.”(utano)

So it seems.

Chapter 35 Reunion (2)

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After finishing the late lunch, having nothing else better to do, I simply leaned back on the chair doing nothing.

I stared at the ceiling but it's not like there was anything worth watching there either. Now then, what should I do next?

"Now then, I'll clear up the tableware and return in a moment, 'kay?"(utano)

I looked towards Utano-san who rose from her chair as she said that. She had her usual serious-looking face that I was well acquainted with.

"I could at least help with that....."(renji)

"Injured should just rest. Don't worry, I'll make you work enough to pay back for this later."

That sounds unpleasant on its own though. Any job from her sounds troublesome, or should I say, a total pain. As if she had read through my thoughts, Aya sitting beside me gave a short laugh.

"I have a bad feeling about this, really."(renji)

"How rude. Do you really think I'll give you a job solely to tease you, Yamada-kun?"(utano)

You would, definitely.....I wonder what would happen if I actually said that?

While thinking of that, I moved my gaze away from Utano-san. I felt like her gaze became even colder but let's just ignore that. I feel like I'll be dragged even further down if I pointed that out.

"Let me help as well."(aya)

As if trying to help me, Aya also stood up and began gathering the

plates on the tray. Utano-san's gaze moved towards Aya at that.

As I felt relieved inside my heart, Utano-san suddenly looked at me again. I panicked and ended up straightening up my back.

"Renji-san, please take a good rest now."(aya)

"Yeah———"

"I'll keep watch so its fine!"(fairy)

Just when I was about to reply to Aya, Anastasia gave a reply while standing near my ear. She had returned to my shoulder from Utano-san.

"……..heavy."(renji)

"Ahn?"

Even if you're a fairy, it's really weird for a girl to make such sounds. Near my ear, Anastasia spoke in a really low but cold voice. It's not like the first time I'm hearing her speak like this; she speaks like this when she gets a bit angry.

"Wow, Anastasia is going to stay with me, I'm so happy.."(renji)

"Good, good. Show your gratitude with tears in your eyes Renji."(fairy)

"Fufu."

Was it Aya or Utano-san who laughed at that? That said, Anastasia's mood still seemed to have not changed. Her voice is back to normal but she's probably still a bit angry. Or rather, she's definitely angry. As you'd expect of a woman—well, I doubt she's mentally grown enough to even be called a woman. I guess I shouldn't have said that about her weight. It was only a joke though. Well, that excuse won't work now though.

"Anastasia, you sure get along with Yamada-kun, don't you?"(utano)

"Of course. But don't worry, I don't whip injured people so I won't do anything like that."

"Wait, if I hadn't been injured were you going to whip me!?"(renji)

"That or, would have hung you down the window."

That's equally scary! That's inhumane. I'd die, you know?

"That aside, Utano-san.."(renji)

" Hoh? 'that aside'....?"(fairy)

"Utano-san, take this one with you, she's really starting to scare me."(renji)

"Don't worry. I'm not scary, not scary at all."

The way you're speaking as if trying to persuade a pet animal only makes it more scary stupid!

"You two really do get along."(utano)

"Eh, where? How?"(renji)

When I asked that, Utano-san simply gave a smile and Aya just gave a sigh. Anastasia simply silently pulled on my ear. It doesn't hurt but it does tickle so really, stop. As my body stirred, she started putting more strength in her hands grabbing my ear as if she was having fun with it.

"Don't start fighting and destroy the room, okay?"(aya)

"No need to worry. We won't imitate you and Koutarou."(renji)

".....you still remember that?"(aya)

Surprised for a second, Aya then hid her face in embarrassment.

Once, while on our journey, those two fought in an inn which led to a full out magic battle inside a room. I don't remember the reason behind their quarrel but I remember how troublesome it was to deal with it after wards. We had to pay so much just for the repairs.

But it sure was easy back then. The country would pay for all our expenses. Well, both me and Utano-san had to bow and apologise to the Knight commander O'brien who was travelling with us along with the Knight Order though. It can't be helped. It was totally our fault after all. Well, Aya and Koutarou's fault to be exact.

"How nostalgic. Also.....you sure remember everything concerning Aya eh Yamada-kun?"(utano)

“Yuuko-san!”(aya)

“No need to react that much. Don’t drop the plates you’re carrying, okay?”(utano)

“Uu.....uuu”

While talking like that, those two left the room.

“Ah, Yamada-kun?”(utano)

“Hm?”

“Come to my room at night. I’ll be waiting for you.”

Saying that at the very end, she left. Aya seemed surprised, or rather, was blushing madly. Well since it’s Utano-san we’re talking about, she’s probably just wants to talk about what we’ll do next. There’s the matter of the Demon God’s heart as well. I’m not very excited about this. I have already had my expectations destroyed countless times by her like this. Even I’d learn after failing so many times.

Aya though, I wonder what she imagined? I’m definitely gonna tease her about this later.

“What does she mean?”(fairy)

“Well, it’s adult talk, you don’t have to worry.”(renji)

“.....”

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With Anastasia still on my right shoulder, I left the room. I did try lying back down on my bed but ended up feeling way too bored. Since I had been sleeping for 5 days already, I didn’t feel like sleeping either. It didn’t feel right to keep on lying on my bed needlessly. So, I decided to leave the room for a walk. It’s necessary to move my dull body as well after all.

“just when I was finally free from Ermenhilde, now I have to deal with you eh.....”(renji)

“What’s up with that? Even though I’m keeping you company so that you don’t start feeling lonely.”(fairy)

“Yeah yeah. Thank you very much for that.”

“I don’t feel like you meant a single word of that though?”

“Oh I am very thankful, really, Anastasia-sama.”

Angrily, or rather sulkily, Anastasia turned her head away to the other side. Instead of the usual Ermenhilde, now I have Anastasia to talk to. Can I never get some alone time?

While thinking like that, I walked through the empty corridor. The brand new leather boots prepared for me made a dull sound as I walked. It was a bit chilly here but since the weather was nice, I’m sure my body will warm up as I walk.

Even though I was bedridden till just now, I have become able to walk just after one meal. The cheat abilities sure are something. Not just our physical abilities, even our restorative capacities are in a level above normal. Well, I’m still nowhere near the superhuman levels Souichi and others have either. If it were those guys, they’d probably be able to move around almost instantly after resting.

“You have a gorgeous fairy walking with you, you sure are a human living in extravagance aren’t you?”(fairy)

“You’re not supposed to say that yourself, you know?”

Well, true, Anastasia is definitely a beauty. With curly green hair and wings on her back. A fairy, that only existed in tales and legends in our world, existed here as if it was common sense. And for some reason also sitting on my shoulder. She’s only 15 cm tall but even then her beauty is incredible. Other women around me—like Aya or Utano-san were beautiful as well but Anastasia’s beauty was almost unrealistic. Her body even had curves and covered with the thin silky white dress, it’s safe to say that it was poison for any man’s eyes, even at her size. Even like this,

she's cute like a doll. Well, she's actually a fairy though. As expected, I wouldn't harbour weird thoughts for a fairy the size of a doll. I'm not far off gone yet, neither am I that thirsty. In fact, if I ever did end up looking at this pipsqueak in that way, I think I would have lost then. And somehow, Anastasia also understands my thoughts so she'd often tease me in that manner. Back then, Koutarou and other who were excited about getting summoned to another world were getting excited saying "It's a fantasy world!" when they met her but apparently in Anastasia's eyes, that reaction was an instant 'out'. Though in my opinion those kinds of guys would be more fun to tease like this though. But for some reason, she decided that I'll be the only one who'd have to deal with her teasing. I don't understand the basis behind it at all.

She'd also get into a lot of fights with Ermenhilde as well. I guess it's that, 'the more they fight, the closer they are', or something like that.

"If only your personality wasn't like that.."(renjii)

"Oh? What does that mean I wonder?"

"Who knows indeed.."

But still, how come I haven't seen any other people even though its still bright outside? It felt as if we were the only people in the astle.

"Where are you heading?"(fairy)

"Nowhere particular."

I left only because I was bored inside my room. It's not like I had decided on a destination when I left.

And for some reason, Anastasia, Aya and Utano-san, not a single one of them would tell me where Ermenhilde was.

Even I won't try running away after all this time.....probably. I'm a bit worried for Feirona and the others as well. I want to go and meet them.

"Haah.....then let's head to the training ground maybe? Yui and others should be there right now."(fairy)

"I see."

Anastasia said that as if fed up. Well, since I really didn't have anywhere I had to go, I turned to move towards the training grounds. 3 years ago, though not for long, but I did live here. I remember the way. Taking a right, I went down the staircase where I met a few of the soldiers on guard duty. I finally met people inside the castle but even when I greet them they'd simply salute. They sure have been trained well. I ended up admiring them. Though it'd be nice if they'd just greet back when I do so. I am just an adventurer now.

I may have been summoned as a Hero back then but the reason why I was summoned has been completed. For someone like me who can only fight at his fullest against the Demon God, I don't think I have much value left now. But even then, the gazes of the soldiers I passed through were as if they were seeing something sacred, filled with zeal and passion. In my old world, I would never get something like this I ended up feeling confused as to how I should act.

She must have felt something about this as Anastasia began to poke my cheek as soon as we were out of the soldiers vision.

"Why the hell are you getting all nervous for?"(fairy)

"I'm not really getting nervous to be honest."

If I were to choose, what I felt was more closer to guilt rather than nervousness. During the journey, I was of use only at the very end. And that power as well was achieved at the cost of countless sacrifices. But the Demon God is no more. And his descendants can be defeated even without my help. And when even those would have disappeared———my cheat will become completely useless. A GodSlaying weapon is useful only till there is a god that needs to be killed.

What worth does a human like that even have. Without that, I am nothing more than an adventurer and Ermenhilde is nothing more than a talking medal. Well, that's rare in its own way though.

.....And to be honest, I have no problem with that but what does Ermenhilde think about that? Will it still ask me to treat it as a weapon? Or..... I want Ermenhilde to find a path where it isn't a weapon anymore.

That's why I wanted to show the world to Ermenhilde to open up its choices.—–I want to find that path together. That is the reason behind my journey. Even I think that it's a really immature objective though. Well, I think Utano-san might have realized that already though. Her intuition is way too sharp.

"What happened, sighing like that. Is there a problem?"(fairy)

"Just felt a bit ashamed.."

"Haah?"

When I said that, Anastasia made a surprised sound.

To them, I may be a hero who saved the world. But I chose Ermenhilde over the world. Rather than supporting the whole world, I ended up deciding to chose to support just my partner. I don't even have the resolve of a hero, and not to mention that I have to put others in danger just to fight properly. There's no way you can call that a hero. That's why—-those gazes, from soldiers whose names I don't even know, felt heavy.

"This is the castle of humans and you are the hero of those humans. Act more confidently.....you're so not cool at times."(fairy)

"I feel like I'm never able to act cool though?"

I have not been living a life where I could be called 'cool'. I'm just desperate. And was able to luckily survive till the end, that's all.

Anastasia seems to understand that as well as she poked my cheek while smiling. Her tiny finger felt a bit ticklish and I stiffened my face at that. My reaction must have felt amusing as Anastasia started laughing in a small voice.

"Well, that's true as well I guess."(fairy)

"Aren't you supposed to refute me there?"(renji)

"You want me to refute you when you yourself said that first?"

"Yeah."

"I really don't get you."

While we were talking, some well dressed nobles appeared to pass by in front of us.

As I let them go first, they looked at me confusedly.

Well, I guess they can't help it either. I'm dressed in nothing more than a nice tunic and trousers. That's not how normal people dress when inside the royal castle. The soldiers may remember me since I frequently went to the training ground 3 years ago but I doubt the nobles would. Not to mention I never returned here after the Demon God was subjugated. So I never had a chance to meet these nobles face to face like my other comrades. I hate things like banquets and parties so even in those I'd simply stand near some wall. There'd be very few nobles who'd remember me.

They must have found it even weirder that such a human had the fairy queen Anastasia, contracted to the Hero Hiyuu Yui, on his shoulders. They must have decided that it must be one of Anastasia's whims since they didn't ask me anything.

"Normally, they should be the ones to let us pass first you know?"(fairy)

"Not really."

I don't really understand how administration of land etc works, but I know that its these nobles who are running the country. They are much more useful than me, who only knows how to swing his sword, now that world is free of the Demon God.

"You're such a....Why do you always put yourself below everyone else?"(fairy)

As I walked towards the training ground, Anastasia said that to me. Whether it be her or Ermenhilde, why does everyone say the same thing to me? Compared to Souichi or the others, my achievements and abilities are both way below them.

"That's just my nature."(renji)

"That's not a 'nature' it's a disease.....Fix it, it's not cool."

She said that not in her usual playful voice but in a more serious—truly like the queen of fairies.

“I am fine the way I am. I find even my current status to be more than what I deserve to be honest.”(renji)

“You may say that modesty is a virtue but from my point of view, excess modesty is simply being servile. It’s unsightly. It doesn’t suit you Yamada Renji.”

“…….You say the same things as Ermenhilde.”

“No way!?!”

Her queen like pressure instantly dissipated. How flimsy is your character. While getting amazed by that, I sighed. How should I say this..

“You haven’t changed at all.”(renji)

“Renji, you have become more depraved though. Back then, you were more energetic.”(fairy)

“Well, I’ve lost my objective for coming to this world after all. It’s obvious I’ll become lazy.”

The Demon God had to be taken down urgently. As long as that thing was alive, lives were being taken. We couldn’t forgive that which is why we went and killed it in a matter of 2 years. Putting our lives on the line, after making countless sacrifices, gaining the trust of many, and to stand up to the expectations of the whole world.

Once again, I passed a few soldiers. This time, they went and bowed to me……Really, just stop. I really don’t like being in such a position. As if she read through my mind, Anastasia gave a sigh.

“The world’s finally heading to peace, I’d say I’m allowed to live leisurely aren’t I?”(renji)

“Well, I think the same way. After all, we are travelling all around the world on Fafnir. Yui has become quite able to talk with people on her own, you know?”

“Oh, that’s great. Back then she’d always hide behind mine or Kuuki’s

back after all."

"Seriously. Our master sure is a timid person."

I find that as one her good points though. As a man, you'd end up wanting to protect her no matter what when she acts like that. How should I say it, she's like a small animal. That's what Yui-chan is like. Has a small voice, even her height––well she was the youngest of us all so I guess that couldn't be helped.

As I was reminiscing about the past, Anastasia, this time, pinched my cheek. Still really didn't hurt though.

"Like I said, don't think about other women even when you're with a beauty like me."

"Other women, you say.....she's your master, you know."

"Even then! You really don't understand a woman's heart Renji."

"Well, I am man after all."

"That's where you're wrong. Even without understanding them, worrying and paying attention to a woman is what makes a good man, Renji."

That sure sounds difficult. As I shrugged my shoulders, my cheek was pinched again. If I treated her like a woman, I'll only get teased for it so I don't want to do it.....I guess that's just me being rude though.

It seemed that she also understood my thoughts since she didn't actually get angry. She was actually smiling, in fact. Really, how does a woman's heart even work? I really won't understand them till the end of my life.

"Is that how it works?"(renji)

"That's how it works indeed."

How many times have I gone through this kind of conversation? Though my partner would change from Utano-san, Aya and now Anastasia. Basically, I'm being told to understand a woman's heart more it seems. Even though I am actually trying to get better at that you know.

There was only one who told me that it wasn't necessary to understand her womanly heart. Thinking till that, I shook my head. At the same time, my head was hit by Anastasia again.

"Sorry."(renji)

"Since you apologised in advance, I'll forgive you this time."(fairy)

"Why thank you."

"Be grateful, okay?"

"Oh I am grateful indeed, Anastasia-sama."

When spoke jokingly, she hit my head again. After walking for a while, I finally reached the entrance to the training ground. On both sides of the corridor were iron swords, spears, axes, and shields, leaning against the walls. As I looked at the nostalgic view, I felt unspeakably calm inside.

This is it. The place where I started. The place where I, who had a weak cheat, first gained the power to actually fight. The place I learned the way of using weapons.

For some reason, my heart began beating loudly. I was slightly, excited inside. I myself had not realized that my footsteps had gotten lighter as I crossed the gate.

"He's a man, after all."

Anastasia said something in a small voice but I ignored it and entered the training ground as every soldier's gaze concentrated towards me. That was, nostalgic as well. I also noticed some faces I recognised.

The square shaped ground was huge; even with a few hundred soldiers training at the same time, there was still space left.

Right now, at the centre of this ground was a deep crimson dragon resting while coiled up. The sunshine must have felt nice to it as it didn't seem to move and seemed to be sleeping. Though I doubt it's actually asleep. It's very sensitive to the presence of others after all. Though it remained with its eyes closed even when I entered the ground.

As I looked at the surroundings, my gaze met with few soldiers again.

This time, they waved their hands at me with a happy smile. To me, that reaction is many times better than the admiring gazes I'd get.

While greeting them with a slight bow, I walked towards the familiar deep crimson body—towards Fafnir. The surroundings seemed to become noisy but I didn't pay them any mind.

Becoming aware of my presence, it felt as if the dragon slightly stirred.

"It's been a long time, fool."

"Wow, that hurt."(renji)

My face cramped at its very first words. Well true, I am in fact a fool. A fool that chose Ermenhilde over the world, over my comrades. But still, that's not how you should start a conversation you know?

It opened its eyes and its golden eyes pierced through me. Its body was over 30m in size, even its head alone was bigger than me. Its head suddenly closed in on me and its breath made my hair sway. Its pressure alone made my body freeze.

"You've changed."

"Hm?"

I took a step back. I may not have spent much time with it as a comrade but I am well aware of its personality. It's not really angry, neither is it amused. In the first place, it wouldn't really care about the actions of a single human. The reason I took a step back was because its head was too close to me and its every breath was almost painful. Anastasia was almost blown away by it. She hugged my face tightly but that's making me feel all sorts of softness so really, just stop.

It's single word resounded through my body like thunder. This is a dragon. An existence that could be called one of the strongest beings in this world. It's single breath could burn away the land and could break through the atmosphere with its wings. It's claws were sharper than steel and a single swing from its tail could turn even an Ogre to meat paste. It was an existence that could be considered abnormal even by cheat users like us. This was Fafnir. The strongest Dragon King.

By the way, though, the reason he became our comrade—became contracted to Yui-chan was absolutely stupid.

A spear had stabbed into the sole of its foot and it couldn't take it out by itself. As it was rampaging around in pain, we defeated it and Yui-chan who learnt the reason behind its rampage took out the spear and saved it. Truly, absolutely, stupid reason.

Well, though the reason was stupid indeed, we almost died while facing the rampaging Fafnir. I still have a bit of trauma from that. Souichi, Masaki-chan, Aya, Kuuki; every fighting specialised member fought against it and they could barely succeeded in just bringing the flying dragon down to the ground.

"You've lost your ambition. You've grown cowardly, God Slayer."(faf)

"It can't be helped. I did something incredible as killing a God even though I'm just a human. It's normal that I've lost all my energy after that."

Though I wonder if I ever had something as grand as some ambition in me.

"You killed it with pure hatred. No maybe that's why you've grown cowardly now."(faf)

"……coward, coward. You really don't hold back, do you?"

"But of course. You're completely different from what you were an year ago."(fairy)

"After all you've changed from the man that this little insect fell in love with."(faf)

"Who are you calling an insect?!?"(fairy)

Wait, that's what you're angry about?

"Eh, what? Did you perhaps like me or something?"(renji)

"Don't get conceited, you incompetent fool!!"(fairy)

"Wow, that really hurts you know.."(renji)

Even though it was Fafnir who said that, why am I the one getting scolded? Not to mention, she's angrier than when I joked about her weight.

"Just when I thought it had gotten quieter, it's become noisy again."

When I said that, Fafnir closed its eyes again. As it lay its neck back to the ground, it felt as if the ground slightly trembled. That's how much pressure this dragon gives off. Its every small action makes one nervous. Is this the disposition of a King? As expected of an existence that is considered superior by even the Demon King, who rules over all the monsters

"Yui was worried about you. Don't make her worry too much, GodSlayer. She's a crybaby after all.....when she cries, she's more troublesome than that insect over there."(faf)

"I don't really mean to do that."(renji)

I definitely do not enjoy making women cry. When I said that, I felt as if the pressure from the dragon in front of me lessened a bit. It talks harshly but worries about Yui-chan the most. I could feel a connection between them not just that of a monster tamer and dragon but something more. Even Anastasia, who was being noisy, went silent when Yui-chan's name came up. There as well, like Fafnir—-I could sense a bond and emotions. As my cheeks loosened in a smile, Fafnir opened its eyes again.

"What?"(faf)

"You've changed as well."(renji)

"—-Mu."(faf)

"It's being tsundere, I tell you. It tries to act cold and aloof but was also worried about you Renji."(fairy)

"That word does not suit at all so please stop, Anastasia."(renji)

Don't say things like 'Tsundere' while in a fantasy world. Think about my dreams and hopes.

"What does that word even mean? I do not understand the word but it

feels very unpleasant."(faf)

"If you've got a complaint, take it Koutarou. I plan to as well."(renji)

"Seriously……that brat is troublesome as well. Teaching weird words to this already noisy girl."(faf)

But still, I looked around. There are soldiers who are looking at us curiously but the people I'm looking for aren't here.

Yui-chan, Kuuki, and Knight. Where are they?

Well, Kuuki must be busy with work most probably.

"Where's Yui-chan?"(renji)

"Went to look for you and that insect. Knight went with her."(faf)

"Huh, we didn't meet them though?"(fairy)

"Like I care. You must have missed each other."(faf)

Well, that's too bad. I should have lazed around in my room a bit more. Yup, let's laze around in my room when I return.

I've been working too hard recently anyway, I should relax more it seems.

"That aside, Fafnir.."(renji)

"Hm?"

"Know where Ermenhilde is?"

"I don't."

Instant denial. Try to chose your words better can you? When the conversation's cut like that, I can't keep on talking now can I?

"Who cares about that medal woman?"(fairy)

"That won't do. She gets lonely pretty easily you know."(renji)

"……"

"Could you stop pulling my hair so silently. Please."

What if I go bald? This idiot.

But still, where have these guys kept Ermenhilde? She isn't of much use to others. Not to mention that she talks a lot.

Let's look for Kuuki now. I turned away from Fafnir and began walking.

I don't want to meet Commander O'brien even by a mistake though. That guy thinks with his muscles so if he found me who ran away to the villages, it'll end up being a physical talk instead. That alone, I really want to avoid. I'm still recovering. Well, I'd avoid him even if I wasn't.

"Renji."

While I was thinking of that, the Dragon King called me. By name, like back then. Happy of not getting called by that incredibly embarrassing title, I turned around as its golden eyes pierced through me again.

"What were you doing, for the past one year?"(faf)

"Travelling.....with Ermenhilde?"

It couldn't be helped that it ended up seeming like a question. I was just lazing around in villages after all.

"No."(faf)

But, as if not satisfied with my answer, the Dragon King looked down on me with strong eyes. His thunderous voice captured me. And his strong willed eyes saw through me. That one word alone, as if it held power, made my body tihten.

Yeah certainly, this is an existence far surpassing human kind. My weakness, pain, wounds, without minding any of those, it overpowered me.

"Why, do you obsess over Ermenhilde so much?"(faf)

"Because she's my partner. And, I promised her.....that once we had peace, we'll see the world together."

(T/N: I'm going to use female pronouns for Ermenhilde from hereon as everyone else clearly refers to ermenhhilde as a woman. Though its interesting to note that in japanese, Renji himself has never used female pronoun for her. He always uses partner, gender neutral words or simply

uses her name.)

That's right. I promised her. My precious promise—-as precious as my own life. The gold coloured.....

"That's not it Yamada Renji."

Anastasia stood up from my shoulder and pulled on my clothes. She seems to be saying something but I couldn't hear her.

I couldn't move away from Fafnir's eyes. Rather than saying that I couldn't move my eyes away, it felt as if I would have lost if I did avert my eyes.

"That promise was made with Eru, not Ermenhilde."(faf)

"Yeah, that's right. That's why I'll fulfil that promise."

When I declared that—-

"I see."(faf)

Saying just that, it closed its eyes.

Released from the golden eyes, I breathed a sigh. For some reason, Anastasia was sighing as well. Normally, they'd talk lightly but as expected, there are levels of difference between a Dragon and a Fairy. Even I could only whisper to myself that it really was a dragon that went all out even against his comrades.

"Let's go. Let's look for Kuuki next."(renji)

"Ye—yeah. Let's do that. Since Yui is looking for us as well, we'll meet sooner or later."(fairy)

"Well then, see ya later, Fafnir."(renji)

"Yes. Next time, I want to meet the not-cowardly you, Renji."(faf)

"I'll try to live up to your expectations."

Saying that, I shrugged my shoulders. But Fafnir wasn't even looking at me.

Chapter 36 Reunion (3)

*

"Now that I remember—"

As we left the training ground, Anastasia, who was pulling me along by my sleeve, spoke. I wonder what does the scene of a 28 yr old man being pulled around by a floating doll look like?

If it was a pretty guy like Souichi instead of me, it'd probably be okay but in my case.....how should I say this, even I myself can't imagine it at all. Feels like it'd be painful (mentally).

"Before that, could you let go of my arm?"(renji)

"Ah, sorry."(fairy)

When I said that, the loli queen of fairies let go of my hand with an embarrassed look. Was there even any reason to get embarrassed here?

Ignoring her weird reaction, I shook my right arm, that was being pulled, a few times. My upper arm feels really tired now. But I don't know what Anastasia thought of my action, she pointed her small palm towards me with a smile. And in that cute little palm, suddenly very dangerous looking green magical energy began to gather....Why!?

"I don't really get it, but it was only a joke!"(renji)

"That; the fact that you don't get it is what's pissing me off right now."(fairy)

"It was just a joke."

".....haah."

Since her cold stare was too scary, I raised my both hands in surrender.

After a few moments had passed, she simply gave a fed up sigh. No, wait, who could understand the situation right now?

While feeling that this was somewhat unreasonable, I began walking back towards my room. Anastasia, as if normal, flew and landed on my right shoulder. If I said that it felt heavy right now again, I'll definitely get shot with that previous magic. Not to mention she excels in perfectly controlling the power of her magic to cause just enough pain without actually injuring the opponent.

"So, what were you going to say back then?"(renji)

"Eh?"

"Weren't you going to say something to me?"

When I asked again, she struck her hands together as if finally remembering. As usual, she forgets everything when she gets angry.

"What is this promise Faf was talking about?"(fairy) (T/N: Faf is short for Fafnir. A nickname used by some of them, not Renji though.)

"Oh that, it's just a promise I made with Eru."(renji)

Now that I recall, Anastasia didn't know about it did she? Actually, there are very few who know about it even among us. Well, a promise with someone is not something you go around telling others anyway. I doubt Eru herself told anyone else about it either.

"it's a secret."(renji)

"…….it just feels disgusting when a man says that, you know."(fairy)

"As usual, you've got a sharp tongue as well, oh queen."

"Only towards you, Renji."

"Well, isn't that an honour."

"Haah."

When I replied to her frivolous talk in the same manner, she gave a sigh again.

"They say, you let go of some happiness everytime you sigh, you know?"(renji)

"Yuuko and the others have already taught me that as well."

“Then don’t sigh so much.”

“I just can’t help it, seriously.”

Though she says that, she actually seems to be pretty happy.

“But still, isn’t it unfair that Faf knows it yet I don’t?”(fairy)

“Well, it’s like that. Good men have a lot of secrets.”(renji)

“You have really bad taste, seriously.”

“.....I’m pretty sure you’re far worse than me.”

You’ll make me cry! You’ll really make a mature man cry, you know! Goddamnit!

While enjoying such useless banter, we walked through the corridor and reached my room much faster than I thought. As I casually opened the door, a tall black armour was standing in the centre of my room. In the very centre of the colourfully decorated room stood a knight in black so tall that I had to raise my head to look at him fully. But, I was already used to this kind of bizzare scenes as well.

At the same time as I opened the door, the demonic looking knight’s helm turned towards me as well. But the eyes–no, the head that should be inside that helm was non-existent. A full black armour that empty on the inside. That was the phantom knight, KNIGHT. (T/N: since the black knight is named literally KNIGHT, I’m going to put his name in full caps to avoid confusion with other knights.)

The souls of countless knights that had lingering attachments to this world and could not pass on accumulated together giving birth to this immortal knight. It’s the first monster contracted by Yui-chan.

“Oh, so you guys were here.”(renji)

“.....Ah, Renji-san.”

Sitting on the chair, as if being constantly protected by the knight; the small white girl spoke in a small voice. White hair and red eyes. In the words of our world, she was an albino. One of the 13 who was summoned with us, Hiyuu Yui.

Seeing a more mature expression on her face than of those in my memories, I felt a bit happy inside. I wonder if this what a father feels when he sees his daughter grow up.

“You’ve grown. Did you get taller?”(renji)

“Ye, Yes. Only.....a little, though.”(yui)

“Even your hair is longer now. You look more mature, Yui-chan.”

When I said that, she hid her face blushing in embarrassment. I wonder what he thought about seeing Yui-chan like that but KNIGHT stood in front of her as if to hide her behind him. Since he was really big, he did hide her perfectly.

Like a small animal, her actions really are very cute. So cute that it felt like a waste that she was hidden by KNIGHT. I think, she is now 16 yrs old. Since she is the youngest of us all, her growth is much more apparent.

Her height has grown, and her body is not childish now either. Even her plain, unstyled hair were now properly tied at two ends in braids. Back then, she was just tall enough to reach above my waist but now she almost reached my chest. As she fidgeted in embarrassment, she didn’t seem just cute but also very womanly as well. With high class clothes she was wearing right now, she really looked like a some noble girl.

Since it was weird to talk while standing, I sat down on the chair directly opposite to Yui-chan. I still had an image of her looking frail and pale faced inside my head, but now she truly looked like a girl of her age. Even her pure white albino hair that I wasn’t used to seeing back then, now simply feel normally beautiful. It must be thanks to me being acquainted with silver haired women like Mururu or Astraera. While I was observing Yui-chan, Anastasia , once again, hit my head. She tried stabbing my eyes with her tiny fingers. For a queen, she sure has bad manners.

“Wait, it doesn’t even make any sense this time.”(renji)

“Staring at a girl like that, are you a pervert?”(fairy)

“I’m not staring. I’m simply happy to see how Yui-chan has grown.”

“But your gaze especially feels like a pervert’s.”

As we began quarrelling, the black knight released some overpowering pressure silently. With its height, and being an actual phantom, it felt really weird. Or rather, seeing magical energy come out from the joints in the armour like flames looked actually pretty scary.

I know that fire won’t actually spread but seeing a human figure burn right in front of you is definitely scary. It seems Anastasia felt the same as she quickly shut her mouth.

“Umm, please don’t fight……”(yui)

“No no, we aren’t fighting at all. This is, well, that, right Renji?”(fairy)

“We’re just messing around, Yui-chan. So please, hold KNIGHT back a bit.”(renji)

The blue flames of magical energy indicates that he’s entering battle mode. It’s probably not serious but the pressure it gives off is too much. I feel like my life will get cut short just by being close to it.

Since it’s a phantom of knights, it’s battle skills are in a completely different level. At the same level as Souichi with his cheat, maybe even stronger. Obviously, I’m confident that I’ll lose to him in a one on one. Even if Anastasia was to help me, in the current situation, she’ll get smashed before she could even try using some magic, and then I’ll be slowly cooked to death by it. Well, I’m sure he is still just trying to threaten and is not serious.

“Ah, KNIGHT-san, it’s fine now.”(yui)

When she said that, KNIGHT took a step back. The pressure also instantly disappeared and the blue flames also vanished. He sure is a loyal to her. I ended up smiling seeing the usual KNIGHT. He really doesn’t change at all. I don’t know whether I’m feeling happy about it or just feeling really nostalgic.

“fuu, that was scary.”(fairy)

“So, sorry….Ana.”(yui)

“It’s fine, it’s fine. It’s my fault for teasing Renji too much. Yui isn’t at fault.”(fairy)

Anastasia flew to Yui-chan’s side. And, as if it was her usual spot, flew and sat on KNIGHT’s shoulder. That contrast between white and black was really beautiful to look at as usual as well.

“Well, it had been quite some time, so I ended up frolicking a bit too much I guess.”(fairy)

“fufu, Ana had been lonely for not getting to meet Renji-san for so long, weren’t you?”(yui)

“No way. I simply thought that he might have gone and died somewhere on the road. Why would I be worried about the likes of him? I’m not kidding, you know?”(fairy)

Why the hell are you looking at me for approval? For the time being, I just averted my gaze while scratching my cheeks.

“Eh, wait, what’s with that reaction!?”(fairy)

When I tried to act as if I was embarrassed, you get embarrassed as well eh? While enjoying seeing Anastasia’s expected reaction in my mind, I kept silent. As I expected, now she started to make meaningless excuses. I don’t think the situation actually required any excuses from your side though.

And Yui-chan’s gaze as she looked at Anastasia warmingly was charming as well. As usual, Anastasia is really amusing.

“Anastasia.”(renji)

When I called her name in a voice as soft and sweet as possible, she ended up going completely silent in an instant.

“Wait, I’m not going to get embarrassed by just that much, I’m not a child!!”(fairy)

The next moment, the palm she aimed towards me was caught in a flash by KNIGHT’s arm. Yui-chan’s gaze turned from a warm one to a

worried one. Or rather, she is starting to get flustered by the sudden changes in the situation.

"Let me go, KNIGHT. It'll be fine, I won't kill him."(fairy)

"Don't say such violent things with a smile, oh queen."(renji)

"Should whip you properly, you oaf?"(fairy)

"Waa, please don't let go of her, KNIGHT-san. Ana as well, you should get used to Renji-san's personality by now....."(yui)

Since KNIGHT was holding Anastasia back, I had lots of freedom but Yui-chan's words gave me the most damage unexpectedly. Must be due to having woken up from a big injury buit by body seemed to be swaying doubtfully suddenly. Seeing me like that, Yui-chan got even more flustered. She's really so cute. I feel like a doting parent, somehow.

"Leaving that aside, Yui-chan–"(renji)

"What do you mean 'that'!?! How dare you treat a maiden's purity so trivially!?"(fairy)

Who the hell is a maiden? You're older than me goddamnit.

"Renji-san as well, don't tease Ana too much."(yui)

"Her reactions were so amusing, I just couldn't help myself."(renji)

But wait, since fairies are all female, maybe she actually is a maiden?

While I was thinking of something stupid like that, Anastasia was rampaging with a red face. Seeing Yui-chan's expression who didn't really understand the situation much, I ended up feeling a bit guilty. I really should stop with these kinds of jokes in front of Yui-chan and Aya I think.

"Sorry, sorry. I'll listen to anything you have to say later so forgive me for now."(renji)

"How dare you speak of this so lightly?! I'm not going to forgive you, idiot!"(fairy)

"Are you sure?"

"Eh?"

“I’ll listen to anything okay? Anything, I mean it.”

“.....uu.”

Well, since it’s Anastasia.....at least in front of Yui-chan, she won’t say anything too reckless. Probably. For the time being, I’ll just retreat to wherever Yui-chan is anytime Anastasia brings this up later. But if she still demanded me something weird.....well, I’ll think about it at that time. Let’s leave that for later.

Since Anastasia finally calmed down, I sighed in relief. Well, I was the one totally at fault though. But some fault lies in Anastasia as well for giving such amusing reactions on being teased, in my opinion.

“Somehow, you seem really energetic, Renji-san.”(yui)

“Well, I can’t keep on sleeping all the time, after all.”(renji)

When I said that, Yui-chan started giggling. Her hair swayed as she laughed and her increase in height made me once again realize of how much time had truly passed.

“It’s nice to see you energetic as well, Yui-chan.”(renji)

“Yes.”

“KNIGHT as well, thanks for always protecting Yui-chan.”

When I said that, KNIGHT gave a silent nod. The helm and armour struck each other to give off a dry sound. His figure of answering with just gestures since he couldn’t talk really looked cool as usual. But since I have a habit of constantly talk, I can never be like him. One day, I want to become a man that can actually talk with just his actions. Well, I won’t become one most probably. I’ll probably get laughed at for trying to act cool.

“By the way, Yui-chan, do you know where Ermenhilde is?”(renji)

“Eru-san?”(yui)

“Yeah, neither Utano-san nor Aya are telling me anything. Of course, Anastasia isn’t either.”

“What do you mean ‘of course’.....mouu.”(fairy)

Ignoring Anastasia who was puffing her cheeks in displeasure, I looked towards Yui-chan. But it seems she didn’t know anything as she shook her head. I looked at KNIGHT as well but he also silently shook his head. It felt a bit surreal.

“Well, just give up. You have been invited by Yuuko at night, right? Just get her to tell you then.”(fairy)

“So it seems. Well, at least I got to move my body around.”(renji)

Just when I said, I leaked a yawn.

“You shouldn’t really move so much after being bedridden for so long.....how about you go to sleep again?”(Ana) (T/N: I’m switching to ‘Ana’ from ‘fairy’ for Anastasia because that’s shorter :P)

“I guess I should do so. I’m out of stamina anyway.”(renji)

“Are.....are you okay?”(yui)

Her surprise and worry filled voice felt really pleasant to hear.

“Yui-chan, you’re the only one who worries for me like this.”(renji)

“....Ahn?”(ana)

“What, didn’t you just say a while back that you weren’t worried about me at all?”

“Guh.....”

When I pointed that out, Anastasia groaned in a very unwomanly voice. Seriously, are fairies okay with this one as their Queen?

As I teased Anastasia like that, Yui-chan laughed happily.

“Yui-chan, you’ll be in the capital for sometime as well?”(renji)

“Yes. The fighting/battle tournament is close as well after all .”(yui)

“....Oh right.”

Now that I remembered, it was already that time of the year. In this world, an year consists of only 9 months. Every year during the 8th

month, i.e. at the start of winter, the biggest festival of Imnesia continent takes place. It's more like the Olympics though. It's full of dangerous things after all. Tournaments involving swords and spears and magic etc.

Since I didn't have very good memories of that, I could only respond curtly like that.

"It seems Souichi-oniichan and the others will take part as well."(yui)

"Oh right, I did hear something like that from him as well, I think....."

But still, Souichi will take part as well. In the first year when we were summoned, Souichi and Masaki-chan had won their respective male and female tournaments. It's already been 2 years from that. How nostalgic.

"Renji-san, will you take part as well?"(yui)

"I haven't heard of anything like that, no."(renji)

"You probably will. Or rather, That old man or Yuuko will make you, won't they?"(ana)

"Don't speak of such realistic things.....it's a bad omen."(renji)

The old man Anastasia spoke of—-O'brien-san, if it was him, he'll definitely try to make me take part in it. Or rather, he'll completely force me to. I owe that man more than my life so if he were to ask me.....yeah.

Oh please, no. I don't want to stand out like that. Well, since Souichi is taking part as well, I'll just hide in his shadow. A man who stayed hidden for a year and the handsome-looking Brave. It's pretty obvious who'd gather the most attention.

For the time being, let's not worry about it since I have yet to hear anything about me taking part, yet. It's not good to worry too much.

"Well then, we should also go back now, Yui."(ana)

"Ye, yes.....umm, then, see you later?"(yui)

When Anastasia said that, Yui-chan timidly spoke that as well.

"Yeah. I'll be in the capital for some time as well. Why don't we go out to play sometime?"(renji)

“Yes. I’ll be looking forward to it!”(yui)

Her smile was really too dazzling. It made me once again realize how much she had grown. Back then, she was more gloomy and would always be more reserved even when someone tried to invite her out like this. Seeing her become more mature like this, I felt warm inside my heart. As she briskly walked towards the door and opened it to leave, she turned around and gave a one last wave before leaving. It might seem childish considering she’s already 16, but that only made it look more cuter.

After her, KNIGHT, with Anastasia on his shoulder, bent slightly and left as well. Since he’s almost 2m in height, I guess it couldn’t be helped. I gave a short laugh.

“Now then,”(renji)

After sending off Yui-chan, I lay down on my bed. Soon enough, I closed my eyes and fell into sleep.

While my eyes were closed, I remembered something from the past. Now that I think about it, back then Yui-chan used to call me [Oniichan] as well. I wonder if she’d call me like that again. Complex feelings rose in my heart. I felt happy to see her grow yet at the same time, the fact that so much time had passed made me feel a bit sad. While thinking of that, my consciousness slowly began to fade away.

At the very end, only Fafnir’s words remained.

[Why do you obsess so much over Ermenhilde?]

Those are the same words that were spoken to me by Astraera and Shelfa as well, an year ago.

Dragon, Goddess, Demon King. Why do these beings surpassing humans always intrude inside my mind so easily? They have too much time on their hands.

……..But, I know the meaning behind their words as well. Ermenhilde. Eru. The one I was unable to protect. The one I truly wanted to protect.

I fell deep asleep. Hoping, that just for tonight, I don’t want to see any

dreams.

Chapter 37 Choice

*

That night, as I walked through the corridor to Utano-san's room to meet her as promised, I passed through many maids. It might seem unreal but women in maid uniforms are really nice to look at.

While thinking of such foolish things, I reached in front of Utano-san's room. That said, there were only a few rooms between mine and her room. When we had been summoned, only me and her were actually adults in the group so we decided that it'd be convenient to have have our rooms close to each other just in case. There was no other ulterior motive behind it.....at least I'd like to think that.

In front of her room, I took a deep breath twice. It's not really late at night right now but it has been a long time since I've visited a woman's room at night, so I ended up feeling a bit nervous unconsciously. Also, I'm scared of whatever scolding she will probably give me as well.

Calming myself down, I knocked twice.

"?"

But there was no response. Feeling a bit letdown, I knocked again. Since I could see light seeping out from the gap in the door, she should be present in the room. I waited for a while, but still there was no response.

Is she really not in? When I tried listening inside a bit, I heard a bit busy sound. It seems like she's in some kind of hurry.

"Please, come in."

Just when I was about to knock again, finally a response came. I could tell it was Utano-san's even through the door.

What the hell was she doing? As I opened the door while confused, I realized that another person was inside the room. Though at as heavy as

KNIGHT I met in the afternoon, he was still much taller than me. A brown haired young man dressed in nice clothes. His thin eyes moved towards me.

“Long time no see, Renji-san.”

“Oh, Kuuki. It’s been a while.”

“Yes. It’s been an year. I was really worried when you were carried in all injured you know?”

As he walked towards me while talking, the difference in our heights made me take a step back. I’m pretty tall as well but this guy still surpasses me by quite a bit. Even in this other world, I’ve not met anyone this tall. His face gives off the impression of someone with a good personality but his height sometimes makes him feel over pressuring at times as well.

Kuuki extended an arm towards and I took it as we shook hands with each other.

“No, seriously, I was afraid you won’t open your eyes ever again.”(kuuki)

“Don’t speak of such unlucky things. That Koutarou’s cheat is always making me seem like I’d die already anyway.”(renji)

“Haha, true. You are always dying according to his cheat aren’t you?”

“……It’s not a laughing matter you know?”

But well, considering that I never did actually die, I guess it can becaome a laughing matter as well. Why the hell is his Demonic Eye’s predictions always wrong? Am I simply that easy to kill or his cheat just broken? I hope it’s the latter.

Leaving that aside,

“Did you grow in height again?”(renji)

I feel like I have to look up more than I had to a year ago. My neck is getting tired.

“It seems so…..O’brien-san also told me to ‘stop growing already’, as

well."

"It's not something that can be stopped on an order you know.....but still, share some of your height with me damnit!"

"Renji-san, you're pretty tall already though."

That's true. I'm currently 180cm. It'll be a pain to me as well, if I grew more.

"Are you guys done talking?"

As we laughed together, a somewhat tired voice came. When we both looked towards the source of it, the master of this room was looking at us with folded arms. Right now she wasn't in her usual robe but in a comfortable looking white negligee-like dress made of some soft cloth. Above that she also wore a thick shawl. Her flaxen hair had been undone and she was giving off a completely different atmosphere than before. Shining from the light of the magic lamp, her beauty was made even more prominent. Even I, who is used to seeing this woman called Utano Yuuko, was completely charmed for a second.

But well,..... even though she had her arms folded, there was no change in her chest area. I looked only for a second but still I quickly looked away so as to avoid getting noticed. As a man, it can't be helped that my eyes wander like that.

The bookshelf in her room that had clearly had an increased number of books from before came into my view. She had a lot back then as well but there were only 2 shelves. But now, covering all of the walls.....except the window to let light pass through, there were a total of eight shelves lined up. And each of them were filled with notes and books.

Even on her work table, there were lots of books neatly lined up. I concluded that she was quickly cleaning up her room when I came most probably. Though I think it was probably too late since Kuuki was already there. She's not really good at cleaning and stuff like that. If it was her back then, there'd probably be books lying around not just on her desk but also the floor.

Finally, I moved my gaze towards her directly.

“Welcome, you’re late.”(utano)

“I had some bad dreams, so I ended up sleeping a bit more than I had planned.”

While scratching my cheeks I moved forwards. I probably shouldn’t say that she was the one that still made me wait outside though. As I thought of that, a light, sweet smell of flowers came to me. Though there are things similar to perfumes used by nobles in this world as well, Utano-san didn’t seem to be interested in them much so I was a bit surprised. I’d laugh like crazy if right now Kuuki told me that he was using the perfume but it seems that’s not the case here.

“Something wrong?”

“Hm, no, nothing.”

It seems in the past one year, she has become a bit more womanly as well. No, well, I did see her as a proper woman back then as well but she does have a habit of being careless and undisciplined when in private even though she acts perfect in front of others so I was simply a bit surprised seeing her use something like a perfume. I became a bit more conscious of Utano-san as a woman as she looked at me confusedly.

Remembering about what happened in the afternoon, another reason may be that I have simply been living a very womanless life for the past year. While I was thinking of that, suddenly my stomach rumbled in hunger. To think of food when smelling flowers…….I guess I prefer dumplings over flowers, stomach/food before romance. The phrase truly fits me.

“Ara, have you not had your meal yet?”(utano)

“…….I was sleeping after all. Well, I’m not that hungry, I’ll be fine.”(renji)

“That won’t do Renji-san. You’re still recuperating, you need to take proper nourishment as well.”(kuuki)

“Yeah, yeah.”

I sat down on the sofa in the centre of the room. It felt a bit weird sitting on such a soft sofa after such a long time. Must be due to the fact that I have been sitting on wooden chairs for a while now. As I smiled wryly at that fact, Kuuki sat down on the opposite side of the table. I’ll just ignore that my stomach had rumbled just now. It’d be embarrassing if I minded it anyway.

Seeing that I had sat down, Utano-san rung a small bell kept on her table. And, as if they had been waiting for it, the door was knocked instantly and a woman in maid uniform appeared. She must be a few years younger than me and Utano-san I think.

I blankly looked at Utano-san as she ordered the maid for some drinks and light snacks. Seeing her order like that, as if she was used to it, somehow suited her. She really looked cool at times like this. Though I feel that I’ll get scolded by her saying that ‘cool’ is not a compliment for women.

When she was done and turned back towards us, our gazes met.

“What is it?”(utano)

“Nothing, I was just thinking that this sofa is really great.”(renji)

“People don’t usually come here but this is still the royal castle after all. If I didn’t arrange for at least this quality of things, others start complaining.”

Well nobody comes probably because they’re afraid of her. Deep inside she has a good personality but her eyes/gaze is definitely scary. We can tell since we’re used to it but for others I guess it’s not that easy.

In contrast, Kuuki has a very gentle and likeable looking face. His extreme height maybe a bit of a minus but because of his thin eyes and gentle expression, he’d be the one people would depend upon in every village we reached.

“It seems the Sage has her own sorts of troubles, eh?”(renji)

“You’ll understand them soon enough as well, oh great Hero.”(utano)

Seeing her speak those words with a sense of confidence, I could only shrug my shoulders. I really want to not understand her those sorts of troubles, if possible. When I looked in front, Kuuki was also nodding his head at Utano-san’s words. Since he’s living in the castle as well, I guess he has to deal with such things as well I guess.

“I’m really not suited to be a Hero.”(renji)

“True. I’m not suited to be called a Sage either.”(utano)

“Oh no, no.”(Kuuki)

While hearing Kuuki’s slightly sarcasm filled voice, Utano-san came and sat beside me leaving a bit of a gap in between. And with a dry sound, placed the black gem-like Demon God’s heart fragment on the table.

“So that’s the Demon God’s heart, eh?”(kuuki)

“It’s just a fragment though. Wait, Kuuki, you hadn’t seen it till now?”(renji)

“Yes, Only the King, O’brien-dono, Aya and your friend called Mururu have seen it till now.”(utano)

What’s up with that choice. If Aya was allowed to see, why wasn’t he? As if noticing my confusion, Kuuki raised his hand while smiling wryly. I don’t really think you need permission like that to speak, you know?

“I was away on a campaign. I came back just very recently.”(kuuki)

“Ah, I see.”(renji)

So that’s why there were so less people during the afternoon.

“You seem busy.”(renji)

“Yes, very much so. Recently, monsters have been a bit too active.”(kuuki)

“The Knight Orders are a bit low on people right now. The 1st Order till the 4th Order are especially busy right now. Especially Yuuta-kun, since he specialises as the [shield].”(utano) (T/N: Yuuta is Kuuki’s first name

in case you forgot.)

“You’re being depended upon a lot, eh?”(renji)

“I’m happy for that but, really, I want to take some rest now.”(kuuki)

I could only give a wry smile at seeing wish for that so desperately. Kuuki’s cheat is [The Shield of Protection]. He simply has no replacement.

After all, with Kuuki there, everyone would be safe even if a dragon-class monster appeared. Kuuki Yuuta wished for a [Shield to protect everyone]. That was made true as a protective barrier created by Kuuki with him as the centre. It even had the ability to decided what all the barrier would protect voluntarily as well. Whether it be a dragon’s breath, a high ranking demons magic, and even Aya or Koutarou’s catacalysm-like magic that don’t differentiate between enemies and allies, his shield has protected us from all that countless times.

Since he has such an ability, he must be leaving for the front lines countless times.

“You’re attached to the 3rd Knight Order, right?”(renji)

“Though I’m still inexperienced, I have been made into the vice commander as well.”

“That’s an amazing achievement.”(renji)

When I said that, he scratched his cheeks embarrassedly. Seeing him like he always did, I felt happy as well.

“He goes on dates with the princess as well so, though busy, he’s pretty happy it seems.”(utano)

“Wai-!”(kuuki)

“……hou. You did get along with her back then as well, I guess.”(renji)

“Renji-san as well!”

Seeing such a tall and handsome guy blush like that, now I feel jealous. Goddamnit. To have a princess as your lover, how envious is that? But

still, finally he did it eh. Soon after we were summoned here, he did quickly get along with her. Before anyone realized even. Seriously, just when we let him out of our sights, he instantly got close to the country's princess. Unlike his face would suggest, he gets to work fast. That's how he is. This might be just my own opinion though, since everytime I say that, he denies it with all his strength.

"So when are you getting married?"(renji)

"I can't right now!?"(kuuki)

"hmmm, 'not yet' eh?"(renji)

Well, their feelings aside, they also have both their positions to mind as well. The princess and the saviour/Hero of the country. There's also the status inside the castle as well––well, once he becomes the commander of the Knight Order, there won't be any problem.

"Aah, c'mon. This conversation has gone off topic too much. Yuuko-san!!"(kuuki)

While I teased Kuuki who was red-faced, I picked up the black fragment from atop the table. I gripped it with full strength but it didn't break. I guess it's useless without Ermenhilde.

"Is it fine to just destroy it?"

"It isn't as simple as it looks. The Spirit God is involved as well after all."

"……And now we're suddenly back on topic, can you guys stop already?"(kuuki)

While listening to Kuuki's tired voice, I returned the fragment back to the table. The Demon God's heart. Since I was the one who once broke it, I know. The Spirit God does have the ability to break a fragment like this. Probably, better than me. But since he sent it to Utano-san without doing that, he must have a reason to do so. In the first place, I broke it one year ago on the Abenelm continent. How the hell did it get here after so long?

“I just want to destroy this as fast as possible, to be honest.”(renji)

“You can’t. it might be necessary to the world from hereon.”(utano.”

At her words, my gaze once again went towards the fragment.

“The heart of the Demon God that tried destroying the world?”(renji)

“Recently, monsters have been acting very weirdly. You should have realized that as well, right?”(utano)

Fumu, I put my finger to my chin

I could remember quite a few examples. An Ogre that appeared inside a village out of nowhere, a descendant of the Demon God, the army of goblins and the Demon controlling them.

Kuuki seems to be busy due to the erratic movements of monsters as well and even that lazy Spirit God decided to take action. There must be something happening where we can’t see right now.

“Now that I recall, that Demon who attacked the Magic City was talking something about resurrecting the Demon God and whatnot.”(renji)

“Yes, I heard about it as well. That also seems one of the reasons.”(utano)

“What do you mean?”

“The ones who created this world were the Goddess, the Spirit God and the Demon god, those 3 pillars, right?”

Saying that, Utano-san raised 3 of her fingers. And then, she bent one of them. We killed the Demon God. That means, this world is currently being supported by the Goddess and the Spirit God.

“But, those 2 alone cannot support this world. That’s because this world was created in such a way that it needs three pillars to sustain itself.”

“Yeah, I know that as well.”

During my journey, I thought about it many times as well. Since those three created the world, would there be no effect if one of them was

killed? Is Utano-san thinking that it's due to that the monsters are acting like this?

That demon said that they wanted to revive the Demon God. I don't know why or how they're using the Demon God's descendants for that though. The descendants are born directly from the power of the Demon God. Monsters were birthed by the Demon God as well but the descendants held power far more than them so they stood above normal monsters and even the Demons. That's why normally, the descendants would be the ones to use monsters and the Demons for their use, not the other way round.

"I'm still looking into it but I think, since we killed one the 3 pillars, the balance of the world has been destroyed."(utano)

"The fact about how the Goddess creates humans, Spirit God creates demi-humans and beastmen and the Demon god creates monsters and Demons?"

"Yes, according to my expectations, there must be some kind of affect showing on the Abenelm continent."

I see. I guess that would be the first place to be affected. But since it was related to only monsters and demons, I didn't think much about it. Since she said that she was looking into it, did she send people to Abenelm. That sounds like trouble, really. Monsters, demonic beasts, and giants rare on these continents run rampant over there.

And if it really is as she says, then I'm not unrelated to this problem. After all the reason behind the weird actions of the monsters.....the one who killed the Demon God was me after all. Karma works in weird ways, I ended up giving a sigh. And above all——if the Demon God is necessary for the world means that we have to revive him, that fucking asshole.

"About that, I think we should get an Oracle from Astraera about it. Did you hear anything?"(utano)

"Why are you asking me? I have heard nothing from her in the past one whole year."(renjii)

“.....well, you’re the most probable ones she’d contact after all. After all, she only gives you all sorts of work.”

“Don’t make me remember. I get depressed.”

“Isn’t thata good thing? You’re liked by Astraera-sama. It would be considered an honour, you know?”(kuuki)

“Shut up. That woman is nowhere near as nice as it sounds.”

She isn’t annoying but she is kind of a pain sometimes. In any case, she troubles me a lot, with all of her requests. Normally, that should be the job for the Brave, Souichi. But I guess reality doesn’t work like fantasy. What kind of side character gets more problems than the main hero?

As I bent my lips in dissatisfaction, the door was knocked. When Utano-san gave a reply, the maid from before came in with a large tray with alcohol and some snacks. Though carpeted, I guess its as expected of a maid to walk without making a single sound.

“Well, let’s leave the troublesome talk for later.”(renji)

The maid quickly arranged everything on the table. The alcohol kept on the table was high class, I could tell with a single glance.....Well, I guess it’s to be expected.

Making the maid move away, Utano-san poured the for me. In replacement, I poured the alcohol for her and Kuuki. The three glasses were filled with an amber coloured liquid and the smell of the liquour mixed with the smell of those flowers from before. Suddenly, I remembered something. If we began drinking and we really will stop talking about the important stuff.

“Utano-san, where’s Ermenhilde?”

“Eh?”

Wait, I’ll be the one troubled if you look at me so confusedly, you know?

“You haven’t met her yet?”

“Well, neither Yui-chan nor Anastasia knew about it. Fafnir didn’t either.”

Instead, I was completely seen through by Fafnir.

“She’s at the place you want to go to the least right now.”(utano)

“.....aah.”

I instantly knew where she was from just those words. Having understood that, I gave an awkawrd sigh again.

I wonder how she saw my reaction, Utano-san took a sip from her glass while looking at me amusedly.

“Oh right, I thought it was oddly silent. So Eru-san wasn’t with you.”(kuuki)

“I’ll tell Ermenhilde later that Kuuki was calling her noisy, definitely.”

“Why did it end up like that!?”

Just somehow. As I teased Kuuki to take out my frustration, Utano-san looked up towards me happily.

“I’m glad you’re safe.”(utano)

“Hm?”

“Even I was worried a bit, you know? I thought that maybe you’d really die.”

Utano-san said that to me slightly moist/warm eyes. Using that expression here is really cheating. Normally she doesn’t even laugh but she’d use such expressions only when we are around. Recalling the kiss again, I became oddly concious again.

In the first place, being called to a woman’s room at night is troublesome in its own way, yeah.....well, I still did end up coming readily though. While thinking about Ermenhilde and the current situation, I took a sip from my glass. It smelled a bit like whisky but its not that strong.

“That’s right, both Yuuko-san and Aya-chan didn’t sleep at all out of worry, you know?”(kuuki)

“Even I didn’t expect to run into a monster like that on this continent

after all."(renji)

If I knew about it, even if it took time, I would have avoided going through the forest. That shitty skeleton. Frankly, I would have definitely died if it wasn't for Mururu. She was that strong.

"But for a monster to corner Renji-san so much....."(kuuki)

"It's not like that. Without his covenants released, Yamada-kun is only as strong as a normal knight after all."(utano)

".....you're correct, but aren't you a bit too harsh?"(renji)

"I am making a perfect evaluation in my opinion. You have a habit of facing enemies above your own strength after all. Fix it, really."(utano)

I have no such habit. I wanted to refute it but I held back.

In truth, I have fought enemies far surpassing my own strength too many times. Supported by my comrades, saved and protected by them as well. It was the same this time as well. I am always made to realize the fact that without my comrades I cannot fight at all. And would have died without them.

"I want to avoid fighting completely if possible though. Wounds hurt like hell and I'm scared of dying as well."(renji)

Moving my gaze away from Utano-san, I picked up a snack to eat. It was probably smoked Orc meat, it really went well with the liquor. I took another gulp from my drink as I dampened my throat with it. It's been a long time since I drank together with these two. I can't not get drunk tonight. It seems those two had the same opinion as their drinking pace increased as well.

The cheeks of the woman sitting beside me became redder and her reddish eyes beneath her glasses became moist. Was she always this quick to get drunk? Or was she that stressed from her daily work? Since I figured it'd be boorish to point out that she was drinking a bit too quickly, I just kept on drinking at my own pace. Well, getting completely wasted at a woman's room late at night would be troublesome in its own way after all.

Kuuki, unlike his appearance would suggest, could really hold his liquor well. Maybe because he has a big body, or maybe it was simply in his constitution. Even when we were travelling together, I have never seen him get completely drunk.

“Seriously, it’d be nice if this problem with monsters would end already.”(kuuki)

“Even after the Demon God was killed, I guess some things never change, eh? This truly is one busy world.”

As I took another gulp, Kuuki began to pour into my glass again, In return I filled his glass and we both gave a small thanks to each other.

“But still, that’s why I want to use this power for the sake of others as much as I can.”(kuuki)

“Ou, do your best. Just like that, you’ll steal the princess’s heart as well.”(renji)

“Enough of that already.....”

His physique aside, he isn’t used to such conversations at all. Well, maybe that’s what makes him popular, a gap in his personality. I really think the princess has a good eye. Kuuki is a nice guy.

“Me aside, Renji-san you should talk about yourself.”(kuuki)

“Me?”

“What were you doing for the past year?”

“I was relaxing in villages with Ermenhilde.”

“You get along with her as usual.”

“.....It’s not that simple though.”

Aah, my left leg hurts. When I looked to my left towards Utano-san, she was still sipping from her glass with an even redder face. Seeing her hold the glass with both hands was really cute. But her right foot that was stepping on my left just kept on getting stronger and stronger. Kuuki might not be able to see it due to the table though. He was still smiling as

usual. Aah, it really hurts.

"Well, I still have many things I want to do. If I am going to die, I'll do it 50 years later while relaxing on a bed."(renji)

"That's true. I guess the threat of monsters should reduce a bit by then at least."(kuuki)

As we continued talking while drinking, finally I was freed from Utano-san's foot.

"Stay in the capital for a while, I have a lot things I need to get you to do for me."(utano)

"Yes."

Giving her a reply in a single word, I sipped from my glass again. Whether it be due to her cuteness or her scariness, I got so nervous in replying just a single word. As she gave a slight shiver I quickly hid my smile that came up on my face from her.

"Then, Renji-san, you won't travel anymore?"(kuuki)

"Well, I wonder about that. I have things I want to do but for now at least, I'll stay in the capital, let's just say that."(renji)

When I answered Kuuki, Utano-san looked up towards me. The red in her cheeks was probably not just because of the alcohol, I think.

"Things to do?"(utano)

"Yes. I want to show the world to Ermenhilde and then quietly retire in some village and relax there. There are others as well."(renji)

"What a great dream. When you retire to the village, won't you invite me as well?"(utano)

"Well, that's only if you still have not found a good man till then."(renji)

"um.....could you two stop flirting alone like this?"(kuuki)

"We aren't really though?"(renji)

"In fact, that's my line Yuuta-kun. Everytime you're there at the training ground constantly talking with the princess. I can see the ground from my

room's window you know?"

"……Ehh.."

As we three laughed, I took another sip. Just as Kuuki said, I did feel that the distance between me and her had shrunk a bit. I know of her feelings as well. And Utano-san knows that I know about her feelings as well. She'll always come close to me but it was always me who takes a step back. Our bodies have come together as well, and we have sought warmth from each other as well. As adults of similar age who were summoned here, I guess its normal for us to have similar wants. It was a completely different kind of relationship than with Aya, it felt really nice.

Maybe someday I'll have to decide where to take this relationship of ours but for now, I just want to get spoiled by her kindness. Maybe that's the main reason I'm often called as incompetent I guess. Recalling Anastasia's words, my thoughts came back to reality. Maybe because she was drunk, even her usual cold gaze was slightly moist.

"Now that I remember–"

After slightly glaring at me silently for a while, as if she recalled something, Utano-san stood up. As she went close to her desk, she returned back with something kept hidden behind her table. Her face was red but her steps were still perfectly straight.

And I knew of the thing that she held in her hands. It's the mithril sword that I had sold long back in that village. Why is that here? I tilted my head in confusion.

"This, is not an item for sale. You shouldn't let go of it so easily, Yamada-kun."(utano)

"Did something happen with the sword?"(kuuki)

"Well, yeah, a bit."(renji)

"This guy sold it for dirt cheap at some village because the village had no money. I had to quickly spend a lot of money to get a peddler to buy it back for me."(utano)

Saying nothing, I kept on sipping my drink. Well, I was out of money which is why I sold it, but I'm not gonna say that. For the sake of my life. If I did, she'll definitely bury me.

"Till you payback the cost to me, you're not supposed to run away, okay?"(utano)

"okay."

And as expected, I had no choice but to take the mithril sword back from Utano-san sitting beside me. The amethyst studded to the end of the handle was proof that it was mine. Since I had no magical energy, I couldn't use it but when you do, the royal insignia would appear, proof that it was an excellent sword.

"You sold a sword you got from the king?"(kuuki)

"And that too, at an extremely cheap cost."(utano)

Stop, my ears hurt. Let's continue drinking. While listening to those two talk, I kept on drinking while feeling a bit ashamed.

"10 silvers. You have to return it okay?"(utano)

"……Eh?" (T/N: reminder, in this world silver>gold>copper, so 10 silvers is a lot.)

What's up with that scary amount!? Kuuki's hand, holding the glass, also stopped in mid air. When I looked to my side, her drunk eyes were directly looking at me.

"10?"(renji)

"Silvers, yes."(utano)

100 golds equal 1 silver so……1000 gold coins. Further converting it to copper, it'd be 100,000 copper coins. By the way, currently I have ten something copper coins on me right now.

I looked back towards the sword in my hand. Since she bought it for 10 silvers, I can sell it again for 10 silver right? I quickly thought losing all the drunkenness inside me. No, wait, but then she'd buy it again and I'll be in her debt again!?

Due to the sudden incredible amount, my head wasn't working properly at all.

"You have my condolences."(kuuki)

"Oi. Stop joining your hands like that, you bastard."(renji)

Seeing our banter, Utano-san gave a short laugh. She really is completely drunk, this woman. Seeing her like that who'd normally wouldn't even smile, I stopped caring about even the 10 silver debt. Well, that doesn't make it any better for me though.

In any case, since I couldn't think of anything anyway, I decided to leave it for later. I feel like I'll get scolded by Ermenhilde later. As I poured more liquor, I realized that the bottle was empty.

"I guess we should call it a night soon."(renji)

"Ah, we're out already?"(kuuki)

"That, and I have something to be depressed about now."

"Well, isn't it fine. It'll be nice to stay at the same place for a while you know?"

"With that big of a debt, I feel like I'll be staying here for the rest of my life though."

Even I could tell that my face was cramping at that.

"Ara, I would be totally fine with that though?"(utano)

"Yeah yeah. The drunk should go to sleep already."(renji)

As if she wasn't happy with my attitude, Utano-san puffed her cheeks. Seeing such a rare expression from her with a side glance, I rested my chin on the table. Just how she serious is she? Thinking of that, I finally stood up shaking my head.

"Well then, let's clean up shall we?"(renji)

"Yes, let's."(kuuki)

But, the moment I was about to start, my sleeve was gripped. When I looked that way, a thin finger was cutely holding onto me. I moved my

gaze towards the owner of those fingers.

Kuuki, pretending he didn't see any of this, quickly cleared everything away and had already reached the door.

"Well then, see you later."(kuuki)

Saying that, without any hesitation, Kuuki left the room.

Heartless bastard.

I want to be praised that I didn't shout that out loud.

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I walked through the corridor late at night. The cold breeze touching my skin gave me shivers but my body was still warm due to the alcohol. It was a stone corridor but due to the carpeting, my footsteps weren't loud, almost nil. As I passed through some of the soldiers doing night guard duty, they bowed to me everytime they saw me.

Decorated shelves, pretty flowers, a silver knight armour set, and a small magical light. All these set along the corridor shone in the darkness of the night.

It felt a bit scary so I ended up fastening my steps. My silent footsteps became slightly noisier.

My destination was the chapel at the end of this corridor. Utano-san said that Ermenhilde was at the place I wanted to go the least. Then, it could only be the chapel. Decorated with the silver statue of the Goddess, the place we were all summoned. The place I got Ermenhilde from Astraera.

After coming to this world for the first time, surrounded by the king and the others, only kids in their teens and twenties appeared. But even so, the country treated us all very kindly. Supported all of us who possessed

neither fighting skills nor knowledge. And they even fought alongside us.

They were all good people. Everyone was. That's why, I thought that I'll work hard for this world. For the people of this country, I decided to fight. I was afraid to hurt and get hurt and true, to kill and to get killed was frightening. But still, I picked up my weapon. I tried to do what I wanted to. Hoping that I could repay the debt to these people.

How long did I walk through the dark corridor? Finally, in front of me, was a giant door. It's appearance was the same as before and the place had not changed at all from my memories. I don't whether I was happ or sad but I pushed the door open with all my strength.

Back then, my breathing would go rough and I was worn out just by opening the door but now I could open it almost effortlessly. Maybe I have grown a bit as well. Thinking of that, I felt a bit weird.

"This place has not changed at all."

When I muttered so, my voice echoed in the empty chapel, among the fantastically beautiful, in the cold air––and at the statue of the Goddess, at the furthest of the chapel.

"Ermenhilde."

[You're late.]

Hearing her somewhat angry voice, I, instead, felt slightly relieved.

My partner I was searching for was lying in the hands of the Goddess's statue.

"Sorry. I got late."

[Seriously. I had to wait for so long.]

Taking Ermenhilde in my hand, I sat down on one of the wooden chairs inside. *ping* As I flicked the medal with my thumb, the ringing sound resounded through the chapel. And the silence was broken again. But, I don't care about that.

Catching Ermenhilde twirling in the air, I opened my palm. It was Heads.

“Hm. Looks good.”

[.....waah.]

Taking a deep breath, I slowly breathed out. The cold air felt nice on my body warm dur to the liquor.

[How are your injuries?]

“I’m fine. Did I make you worry?”

[Obviously.]

“I see.”

Saying that, I gripped Ermenhilde in my palm and stood up.

“Do you remember, this is where we first met.”

[Was that so? Sorry. I have said it before as well but maybe due to having fought the Demon God, I can’t recall things before than too well.]

“No, it’s fine. It’s nothing great.”

On Ermenhilde’s words, I gave a uncaring reply. Even if you don’t remember, even if you have forgotten, even then, I will––

I began to walk. Just before leaving the chapel, I turned back towards the Goddess’s statue.

“I’m back.”

I don’t know if that’s the right thing to say but I spoke that towards the goddess.

<Welcome back home.>

Did I just hallucinate that? But, I felt as if that voice gave me a slight push in the back.

[What happened Renji?]

“No, I have something I have to tell you.”

[What?]

“I’m in debt.”

[……]

“Of 10 silver coins to Utano-san.”

[……Wha?]

While mistaking the way I use my courage, even then, I will——-.

Chapter 24 Road to the Kingdom (1)

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The sun had set, and I was walking through the dark corridor. My whole body ached due to the gruelling work I had gone through during the day.

The cold air struck my skin and gave me goosebumps. It was a stone corridor but a first class carpet was laid on it so my footsteps weren't loud. Groaning from the muscular pains, my footsteps were in disorder.

Shelves decorated with expensive ornaments, pretty flowers, knight armours made of silver, and a small light of magical energy. These things came into my view in the night's darkness.

But all that felt a bit scary which made me walk a bit faster. My quiet footsteps became a bit louder.

My destination was the chapel at the end of this corridor. I didn't really have anything specific to do. It was simply a part of my routine.

In that chapel was the statue of the Goddess. It wasn't real nor did it have the Goddess' soul or anything. Made out of silver, it was simply

nothing more than a statue.

How long did I walk in that dark corridor? But now finally, a giant door was in front of me. I used all my strength to push it open. Because that door was heavier than I expected, by the time I entered the chapel, I was a bit out of breath.

And finally I was inside. In front of me was magnificent stained glass that decorated the windows and the ceiling. The faint light of magical energy shone blue, red, gold, green, purple.....in various colours even though it was night time. It looked so unnaturally beautiful that the silver statue of the Goddess placed at the innermost part of the chapel looked truly divine.

The statue of Goddess Astrarea.

One of the 3 gods that created this world. Ruler of the light and the one that created humans.

In normal temples, people would think that the bigger the statue the better it was but the one here was of the size of a normal human. Maybe that's why it was beautiful, it felt divine.

I tried to close door quietly but the wooden door made a dry sound that resounded inside the chapel.

It's not like it's not allowed to be here late at night but the empty chapel made me feel as if I was doing something bad.

Just like that, as if being pulled, I walked towards the goddess' statue.

Even though I was walking over the carpet my footsteps made sound. Was it simply the air that was cold or was the silver statue giving off the chill I felt? I didn't know but the mental chill I felt made me want to stop in my tracks.

But I didn't.

I felt as if I was being pulled as well. Slightly, though.

As I walked towards the silver goddess I stretched out my hand—but stopped right before touching the statue.

Even though I didn't touch it, I could feel the heat of my fingertip disappear from the coldness of the statue. As if it was frozen, I became unable to move my finger.

Even though it should be impossible. Giving a wry smile, I removed my finger away from the statue. The silent night was so cold that I could even hear the buzzing in my ears. I was alone in this place. I suddenly became afraid realizing that and turned back and walked away from the statue.

But, just before that, I felt I heard someone calling my name. Was it a ghost? I looked around for one. In the first place though, it would be ridiculous for a ghost to appear inside a chapel. Thinking that, I sighed. Suddenly, I felt that my eyes connected with the Goddess' statue.

What did I think at that time.....I remember it clearly even now.

——I want to go home.

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When I woke up, I sighed in relief on seeing the worn out ceiling of my room.

Nostalgic——I couldn't even call it that but it wasn't really a good dream that I had.

It was right about when we were summoned in this world. Somehow realizing the peculiarity of my cheat and understanding that I'd be useless; it was a dream of when I was really dessperate.

Learning the art of combat from the knights, reading books till late night and then prayed to the goddess' statue after getting tired.

That I want to return home.

[What happened?]

"Nothing. Just saw a bad dream."

[.....I see.]

It doesn't ask anything more. From my atmosphere, it must have realized what kind of dream I had. Really, I have a great partner.

Picking up Ermenhilde from below my pillow, I rubbed its rim with my fingers.

"Can I sleep the whole day today?"

[Work. Like a cart-horse.]

".....what a cruel partner you are."

Laughing, I stood up from the bed. Now then, let's work hard today as well.

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When I went to the guild, a scene I wasn't used to was taking place.

As usual , curious gazes from the adventurers were troublesome.

The request put by Souichi and others to take the demon to the capital won't start after a week. Thinking that I'll have to go through this everyday till then, I could only sigh.

From Ermenhilde's point of view, it's a happy thing that I'm the centre of attention but really, I don't want this.

But those gazes were slightly less today. You'd think that they have finally become bored of me but today they were more curious about a very peculiar and rare request client it seems.

At the counter was a white girl.

Her long hair were kept in a ponytail, and her whole body was covered by a white mantle.

Her petite stature showed that she was definitely a girl, her height was

a little higher than my abdomen at most. From behind I couldn't see her expression but I could tell that her appearance must be good considering the amount of gazes fixed on her.

Adventurers——or rather, men were such creatures after all. Even I'd always prefer a cute girl.

And above all, the biggest reason for all the gazes was on her head. Animal ears like that of dog and a fluffy tail that could be seen from the hem of the mantle. Going by her tail, she is not a dog-type beastwoman but a wolf-type.

Beastmen weren't really rare. You'd run into some every now and then inside the town. I don't know why this girl is attracting so much attention but, well, I'm not concerned with it. I went and took a memo from one of the herb gathering request lists.

At that time, I didn't forget to steal a glance of her looks as well. At that, the girl also looked up at me. It was sudden, so even I got slightly surprised.

"Need something?"(girl)

"No, I just found it rare to see a pure white beastwoman, that's all."

"I see. You are a pretty honest human."

She's an indifferent girl. That was my first impression.

Considering she sensed my gaze, she must have sharp senses. It's not rare in beastmen though, so it wasn't really surprising.

I turned towards the receptionist woman to find her making a troubled expression. Her usual smile also felt slightly cramped.

"Did something happen?"(renji)

"Well.....she has come with a request but the details are.."

Is there a problem with the details?

Becoming curious at that, I once again looked to my side.

"What request do you have?"

“To take me to the royal capital.”(girl)

Hearing that, I looked towards the receptionist again at which she shook her sideways.

Well it can’t be helped after all I guess. I also agreed mentally.

“It’ll be difficult so suddenly. No matter how much you hurry, it’ll take at least 7 days to get there.”

And that too by making the horse run as if its life depended on it. Even then, it probably won’t be able to run for days without rest so it would atleast take 10 days.

When I told her that, the receptionist also nodded in agreement.

But the white girl in front of me made a troubled expression.

“Can it not be done faster?”

“Not possible. It would be if there was a better method to travel other than horses but……there are none like that.”(renji)

I remembered the dragon used by the [Monster Tamer] girl. Unfortunately I don’t even know where she is right now.

If it was that dragon, we could reach capital in 2 days. Maybe even earlier. But its useless to tell that to this girl.

“fumu. I see.”

[She has some special circumstances it seems.]

If there weren’t any, she wouldn’t have come to the guild to put a request after all.

Also, don’t sound so happy when someone is in trouble. And, I hate trouble after all. I really want my partner to understand that.

“Are you in trouble?”(renji)

“Yeah, I am. Very much so.”(girl)

Supporting her well shaped chin with her fingers, she went into deep thinking. She must be planning out what to do next from hereon I guess.

The receptionists gaze focused on me. Her expression was pleading me to do something about this girl.

“Are you hungry?”(renji)

“Hm? True, I have eaten only dried meat for the past few days but....”(girl)

“Then about having a meal first. When you’re hungry, your brain won’t work well either right?”

“.....mu. But you know, I’m really in a hurry.”

Saying that she seemed lightly irritated.

It must be an important request seeing she wants to stay at the counter even now. At the same time, she also seemed to be irritated due to hunger as well.

“I doubt it’d be different if you think after taking a meal you know? You won’t get an answer just by staying here.”

“Then, will I get one if I fill my belly?”

“Well, who knows. But, at least your brain would work better than when you’re hungry at least.”

The girl looked down while thinking.

I felt that receptionists gaze was urging me to try even harder.

“I see. You have a point.”(girl)

“It’s good that you understand. Then, there’s a diner nearby where—”

“But, I’m broke.”

I was about to introduce her to a nearby cheap yet pretty good place to eat and be done with it but those words instantly stopped me.

When I looked towards the receptionist, she was also looking at me surprised. It seems she had not yet talked about the reward for the request.

“What were you going to do about the reward for your request?”(renji)

“I’ll pay with my body.”

Do you even understand what you just said?

Inside my view, the receptionist was furiously shaking her head sideways. Well, the guild won’t take part in such services after all.

I sighed while thinking that.

“That won’t work obviously.”(renji)

“Why? I may not look the part but I excel at hunting. I have confidence to not lose to any monster.”

Oh, you meant ‘body’ in that sense!

Once again, this time along with the receptionist, I sighed.

[kukuku, what an interesting beastwoman.]

“Oi, you mimidoshima!” (T/N: mimidoshima is a word used for a woman who has lots of superficial knowledge about sex. I couldn’t think of a an english word suitable for that. Got any ideas? Leave it in the comments.)

[I don’t know what that means but I feel like you just made a fool of me Renji.]

And the receptionist who couldn’t hear Ermenhilde blushed maybe because she thought I said that to her.

Shouldn’t you be angry or refute that normally? To blush like that means she must be not very experienced. How innocent.

“For the time being lets have a meal. I’m tired.”

“But, I don’t have money.”

“I’ll treat you one meal at least. I’m tired, want to take a break.”

[What about work?]

Later.

In this situation, I can’t really abandon this white girl.

“Is it fine?”(girl)

“Yeah. We can think of a solution together while having a meal. We might be able to come up with a good idea.”

“umu. You’re a good man it seems.”

On being told that, I didn’t feel any bad vibes from her.

It will hurt me slightly in the money department but, well, helping people like this may be fine once in a while. Though I wonder whether it can actually be called as helping her.

“It’s my hobby to do one good deed every day.”(renji)

“That’s a very good thing.”(girl)

[This is the first I’m hearing of this.]

Because it’s the first time I said that. If there really was a person who did a good deed everyday, that person would be called a saint.

“What’s wrong?”

While I was talking about that, a voice came from behind.

Turning back, I saw a girl with a somewhat dazed expression and a a handsome elf standing there. It’s Miss Francesca and Faylona(elf). I hadn’t noticed them since I was focused on my conversation.

Maybe because they have good compatibility, they seem to party together a lot. As a party of an handsome guy and a beauty, they do gather attention as well.

“She seems to be in trouble.”(renji)

I pointed to the white girl with my gaze.

“Yeah, I’m very troubled right now.”(girl)

“……is that something to say as if bragging?”

Faylona said that with a somewhat amazed voice.

“I’m not bragging.”

[To me, she simply seems brazen.]

Well, it sure is not something one says while puffing their chests after

all. I agreed with Ermenhilde.

“Anyway, I’m hungry.”(girl)

“I get it I get it. After talking about food, now you’re focused on that?”(renji)

“I’ve been eating nothing more than dried meat and grass for a long time now.”

“Isn’t that amazing. Sounds great for the body.”

When I said that, she puffed her chest proudly for some reason. I’m not complimenting you.

“Why don’t you two also join us? It’s a bit early for lunch though.”

“Well sure. Since you have invited us, I want to come along.”(fran)

Saying that, Miss Francesca looked at Faylona.

“We haven’t even taken a request yet. Do as you wish.”(elf)

“No, I am asking you to come as well.”(renji)

“.....I see.”

Somehow, this guy is stupid in the weirdest of places.

When I looked at him with an amazed gaze, he showed a disappointed expression.

“Well, fine. Then, let’s go to the nearby restaurant.”(renji)

“umu. I leave it to you.”(white girl)

[Is that the attitude of someone being treated to a meal?]

I agreed with Ermenhilde’s words.

Well, her personality isn’t really that troublesome. After we find a solution to her request, we’ll part ways anyway.

I hate trouble after all.

Saying that inside my head one more time, we left the guild. Our destination was 2 blocks away from the guild.

Since its main customers are adventurers, its menu mostly has energy filled dishes and lots of alcohol.

And there are many who drink even though its midday. Maybe because Miss Francesca wasn't used to such places, she seemed to be looking around curiously which looked amusing.

[Don't start drinking, alright?]

I don't have a hobby of drinking during the day. While listening to Ermenhilde, I sat down randomly.

Around the circular table, the white girl sat to my left, Miss Francesca to my right, and Faylona to my front.

Handing the menu to the white girl, I sighed. How did it end up like this. It might be too late for this, but I gave a sigh due to the unexpected expenses.

Just when my wallet had finally gotten a bit thicker. It made me realize that I was really too lax with my money.

"I'll pay for my part."(elf)

"Obviously. I have no intention of paying for men."(renji)

"How harsh."

"Like I care."

[You're just too soft with women.....]

Could you stop talking like I'm some kind of guy who is loose with women?

I still decide whether to treat or not depending on the person.

"Now then,"

I looked towards the white girl who was focused at the menu. Realizing my gaze, she looked towards me.

"What happened? I haven't decided what to order yet."(girl)

"At least tell us your name. I am Renji."

“From there.....? I am Francesca Barton.”

“Faylona.”

“mu. To not have told my name to the one treating me, I have been rude. My name is Mururu.”

“I see.”

[.....It seems like you’re being treated as just a purse Renji.]

Yeah, I’m definitely being treated as just a purse here.

What’s up with this girl really. I could not decide how to interact with this type of a girl.

Would it be okay to get a little angry or should I just let it go? Miss Francesca was also giving me a troubled look and Faylona had a sour face as usual.

“Alright, I’ve decided.”(Mururu)

“She really works at her own pace.....”

Sighing, I told her order to the waiter. But still, its all meat dishes, that too, 2 of them. Can she even eat them both? Frankly, her body is small. When compared with Miss Francesca, her smallness is further emphasized.

“I’m the one paying, don’t you leave any leftovers, alright?”(renji)

“There’s no problem. I can actually eat double that amount.”

A glutton with that small body?!

“Who orders 2 dishes when being treated by another in the first place?”

“I’m really sorry for that. Really, I am but.....frankly, when I thought of a dish other than dried meat, I couldn’t help myself. Really sorry, Renji.”

“.....Dried meat isn’t a ‘dish’ in the first place..”

[Seriously.]

I also nodded.

“Well, don’t mind it. I did say that it was my treat. I won’t break my

promise.”

“You really are a good guy.”(mururu)

“Oh please. I just find everything troublesome.”

[Are you embarrassed?]

I’m not. Hitting Ermenhilde who said a weird thing, I made it shut up.

“Now then, Miss Mururu—-”

“‘Miss” is unnecessary. I may not look like it but I’m a full fledged adult.”

She puffed her chest proudly at that but her body is covered with a mantle so I can’t tell how grown up she actually is.

“Alright, then Mururu, what is your request? While being broke, that is.”(renji)

“Well, there are some deep circumstances behind it.”

“Circumstances?”

“umu. A few days ago, I saved a few adventurers on the highway but later that night, my purse got stolen.”

There’s nothing deep about that, in fact, that’s way too simple to understand.

She got betrayed after helping them. Unable to say anything, we three could only remain silent.

“Well, I wasn’t really mindful about my own money after all.”

“It’s amazing how you were able to travel like that.”

It couldn’t be helped that I sounded almost sarcastic/amazed there.

Money is essential when travelling after all. It’s really weird to hear that you weren’t really mindful of that.

Well, I’m in no position to say that though.

“How cruel....”(fran)

“No, it was my ineptitude that I was unable to see through their true nature. Even though my parents always told me to be always suspicious of others.”

“You, still came along with Renji so easily even now.”(elf)

“.....You’re talking as if I’m some kind of villain, you know.”

“Why don’t you put your hand on your chest and think again?”(elf)

[Well, you hid the fact that you’re a Hero after all.]

Oh that. I’ll say this as many times as you want but I’m not worthy to be called a hero.

I don’t have the honour that Souichi or Aya have. Thinking that, I breathed a sigh. Well, that guy’s not really serious either, he’s grinning after all. Must be enjoying teasing me. What a bad personality.

“Mu.....”

But, when he said that, Mururu’s gaze turned towards me. Her gaze contained a hint of surprise as well.

“Will Renji also deceive me?”

“If I was planning to, I wouldn’t treat you to a meal, neither would I invite these two.”

If I wanted to trick her, I would lie and then lead her to some back alley. Of course, I have no such hobbies though.

“But well, it would be for better if Mururu was a bit more cautious of people.”

“I see. If Renji says that, I will think about it.”

“Why did my name come up there?”

“Because you treated me to a meal. I have been taught to always take the words of my benefactor sincerely and seriously.”

“Well, you’ve been taught well it seems.”

“Umu.”

Oh, we digressed from the topic. I did an *ahem*.

“So, why do you want to go to the Royal Capital so quickly?”

“I have something to deliver to the witch at the Capital.”

“Witch—-The Sage, eh?”

At that, Miss Francesca and Faylona’s gaze landed on me. Mururu made a confused face at that but I simply shrugged my shoulders and turned their gazes aside.

[You won’t come out honest there, which is why you were talked to like that by the Elf.]

“It hurts my ears.”

But still, something for Utano-san eh?

Honestly, I can only have a bad premonition about this. I recalled the black Ogre and Orc I fought.

Why I wonder? It’s just that the moment I heard Utano-san’s name, I could only think of that. I can trust my intuition at such times.

“What is this thing you want to give?”(fran)

“That, I cannot tell. The Spirit God has told me to not show it to anyone except the Witch. I apologise.”

I see, that makes sense. Also, for the Spirit God to have given it, it must be something very important.

Once again, their gazes turned to me but I looked at the ceiling wondering what to do.

[A request from the Spirit God, eh?]

“It’s not a request.”

In the first place, I haven’t decided whether I’d accept this or not.

“That’s why, Renji, is there really any way to get to the capital as soon as possible?”

“I said this before as well but it’d be impossible so suddenly. No matter

how fast you go, it'll take atleast 10 days."

"I see."

Even if you get disappointed like that, even I can't help it.

While we were talking, finally the dishes we ordered arrived.

"For the time being, let's fill up our stomachs. Your head won't work properly empty stomach after all."

"umu, that's true."

But still, an item from the Spirit God.

On hearing the word, Spirit God, I recalled the [Elfreim] continent.

This Imnesia continent where humans live is pretty green but Elfreim is even greener. Compared to how humans live by clearing away nature, the beastmen and demi-humans live together with the nature.

That's why it's the country of the Demi-humans and Beastmen but the rich and impressive beauty of the continent is so great that you cannot forget it once you have seen it.

And the Spirit God is the one worshipped by its people. Such an existence was sending an item to a God SLayer. It's suspicious, or rather, it'll definitely lead to some trouble.

"……waa."

While looking at the white girl stuffing her cheeks full of food energetically, I thought about what to do.

There's also the request with Souichi and others to take that demon to the capital as well but that's 10 days later. It's not much, but this girl probably won't accept it.

Also, riding just horses instead on a carriage should lessen the trip by few days. The problem is that this girl is broke.

I can't exactly say 'alright, farewell.' And just go away now either. Well, I can, but after that I won't be able to sleep properly.

"Um, Mururu-san? You should eat a bit more calmly or its dangerous

you know?"(fran)

"There is no problem."

"I'm the one treating so how about at least tasting the dishes properly before swallowing."(renji)

"Got it."

Seeing the difference in treatment between me and Miss Francesca, we both started laughing. Because she has a small body, she actually feels like some small animal.

"If it's the words of the Spirit God, then I shall help as well."

And, Faylona who had been quiet till now also spoke up.

"Really? I'm in your debt Elf."(mururu)

"It's Faylona, beastwoman."

Are they getting along with each other or not?

And, somehow the talk had advanced. Well, for an Elf, a request from the Spirit God would be very important I guess.

While seeing these 2's exchange, Miss Francesca was giggling while hiding her mouth with her hand.

[But still, do you think they'd leave a request from the Spirit God to just one beastwoman?]

Well, who knows. Did the oracle/divine message include that as well or is there some other hidden reason? Maybe there's someone moving from the shadows as well. It could be that my meeting with this girl was not just some lucky coincidence as well.

Chapter 25 Road to the Kingdom (2)

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In front of me, a white fluffy tail was swaying.

Mururu was sitting on a chair without the cloak she had been wearing so her healthy legs, her butt covered with short-pants like trousers and the tail coming out from it was really tempting to the eyes.

In front of Mururu was the guild's reception counter. She must be worried about whether the request we put up will get accepted or not.

"You should calm down a bit."(renji)

"It's difficult."

[She's like a little kid.]

Really. I agreed with Ermenhilde.

I put up the request in my name but it'll probably be just me, Mururu and Faylona who'd go to the capital. Miss Francesca is a student after all and I can't make a noble's daughter hurry towards the capital anyways.

We were few but since this concerned the Spirit God, we needed to hurry.

At least that's what Faylona decided. Right now, he's out shopping with Miss Francesca to prepare for the journey.

We tried putting up a request at the guild hoping to get a magician to join us but well, I doubt anyone would come forward.

No matter how well spread my name was, there won't be anyone who'd take part in an escort to the capital for almost free. At times like these, practical things like money are more important tha something like the title of a Godslayer or Hero.

There's a limit to how much money both me and Faylona have and also,

even if it was the request of the Spirit God, one wouldn't be ready to spend all his savings for Mururu who was just an acquaintance. Even after this request was completed the fact that Mururu was penniless wouldn't change. Since there was no reward, it'll only create problems for her own livelihood later on.

"I hope we can get some comrades."

"Well, yeah."

Saying that, I flicked Ermenhilde with my finger.

It flew in the air raising a dry sound and when I caught it––it was Tails. I figured as much.

From that sound, Mururu turned towards me. Her wolf ears were twitching which looked really amusing.

"What are you doing?"(mururu)

"Test of luck."

"I see. I hope you get a good result."

And then, she smiled like an innocent child. In a sense different from Ermenhilde, I once again felt that she really was a child. After showing me that smile, she once again turned towards the counter.

Her white tail pushed up her cloak and revealed her beautiful legs hidden beneath it.

Giving a sigh, I turned my gaze towards the memos of the accumulated requests of subjugation quests. I was only looking at them to pass time but I thought maybe I should accept one seeing that my wallet was getting empty. Also, I want to know how skilled Mururu is in battle. For a beastwoman who travelled alone, she should be pretty skilled.

This world is pretty convenient only at such times. You can earn quite a lot just by hunting monsters. A stronger the monster, the bigger the reward as well. And that doesn't take a lot of time either.

"Well, don't have too much expectations though."

“But I want to.”

I guess this is the first time she’s travelling like this. After I treated her to a meal, she has been looking around everywhere curiously. Everything’s new to her here after all. I can tell from observing her.

Beastmen––Werewolves like Mururu, there are others with characteristics of tiger, bear, or rabbit as well. They were not one single species like Humans. They were a community made of a diverse types of species.

The biggest difference between Beastmen and demi humans or humans was that they didn’t utilise money. They depend on bartering instead. That’s why this girl neither panicked nor got angry even after having her money stolen. Even now, she thinks that someone would definitely help her.

This is why even though there is trading between Elves or Dwarves and humans, there’s not much interaction with beastmen. The flow of money was important to the society after all. Profit from every transaction would further enrich the country and that would in turn make the lives of the people better.

True, bartering and trust in your neighbours was also important but that alone won’t develop the society.

That’s why, unlike with the demi-humans, there was not much interaction with Beastmen. The Beastmen really come out of their world, in a way they were self sufficient. There were some who’d come out due to their curiosity towards the outside world or due to some job like Mururu, but they were the minority.

––or that’s how I saw it, to be exact. Well, my opinion has also changed quite a lot in the previous year as well. There were a quite a few Beastmen in the Magic City. I can see them sometimes while walking around the district. Going by the trend, there might be others at the other cities and the capital as well.

I guess the world also changed. While I had retired into the rural countryside.

[How carefree. I'm more worried about what she has to deliver to Yuuko you know.]

Well that's true, I guess.

The relationship between the Goddess and the Spirit God wasn't bad per se, but it wasn't good either.

During our journey, at first they were even hostile.....well not really, but there was discord. There were times we ended up fighting their priests and got injured as well.

For that Spirit God, to have sent something to Utano-san who was an apostle of the Goddess was strange. Well, it must be something troublesome for sure, my instinct told me.

In the first place, this 'request from God' itself sounds suspicious. First we got the 'request' from the Goddess to subjugate the Demon God and had even more unreasonable demands during the journey. For me, it's only normal to get vigilant.

While I was thinking about such old things, the guild's swing door creaked open and Miss Francesca and Faylona came back. The guild became a bit noisy from the appearance of the beautiful combination's entrance.

"Yo, how was it?"(renji)

"For the time being, I asked for food for 10 days. It'll be readied by tomorrow."(elf)

"Then, what remains is transport, eh?"

Food for 10 days. Even if its just Dried Meat or other such preserve able food, it'll be quite heavy. We'll need horses.

In case of horses, though it depends on the quality, we'll need gold coins than copper. (T/N: reminder that in this world Silver>gold>copper) Obviously there are no cars in this world, and the only means of transport is either horses or carriages. Obviously the price gets higher in that case. Not to mention we'll need at least two horses. And going by the rates of

Magic City, my wallet's going to be empty. Faylona's wallet would also have been used up from ordering the food.

Sighing, I stood up. No matter how much I try to save, it soon gets spent somewhere. I felt like crying from that fact.

Then just abandon this, is what Ermenhilde would say but the Witch of the Capital–Utano-san, now that her name has come up, I can't feign ignorance now either. If I had ignored her when I saw the white girl at the counter, I would've been free but now that Utano-san's name has come up, I can't.....that's how bonds work I guess. I end up feeling like I have to do something as well.

Well, Ermenhilde being Ermenhilde, knowing that I won't be able to abandon her anyway but still said that means it really has a bad personality. Remembering her figure from the back standing in front of the counter, I couldn't help it. As an Adult, I couldn't just abandon a child in trouble.

"Sorry but, can I ask you to have the horses readied as well?"

"Yeah, no problem."

Saying that, I stood up at which Mururu's gaze turned towards me.

"Going somewhere?"

"You're coming too. What will Miss Francesca do?"

"Me?"

"We're going to make some earnings. Mururu, let me teach you a bit of how money works."

I said that but she only twisted her head in confusion.

Feeling worried about our future, I could only sigh as I dropped my shoulders.

It would have been fine if she was living in the beast world, but now that she has come here, she'll have to learn how money works if she's going to live with humans.

I don't know how much money was stolen from her but she really must have been easy prey for the robbers.

"By earning, are you going to subjugate monsters?"

"That's right. We don't have much time so we'll just find some easy prey at an easy place."

Saying that, I swayed the memo in my hand.

Monster subjugation. Our opponent will be goblins that can be found nearby. This can also be completed quickly as well. Since we are supposed to leave tomorrow, I don't want to face monsters that would tire us.

Truth be told, I just want to depend on Herb gathering but considering Mururu's personality, that'd be difficult. This girl really hates waiting after all.

"Money?"(mururu)

"Yes, that's right. In the human world, you aren't called an adult until you start earning on your own."(renji)

".....I see.."

"That's painful to my ears."(fran)

[Being half-a-man actually might be better in such a case then.]

Ermenhilde said that but even I think that way. It's weird since I was the one who said that but that's painful to my own ears as well.

Mururu made a surprised expression and Miss Francesca made a sour face.

Mururu's one thing, I think Miss Francesca would be able to earn by herself though. Well, her very first goblin hunt might have become a trauma for her. She almost died after going hunting alone after all, she must have recalled that.

"Leave the horses to me."

"Yeah. For the time being, let's just earn Mururu's lodging fees at least."

Right now, she'd have no choice to either stay with me or spend the

night with the Elves in the forest.

I am one thing, but Elves are usually not very welcome to other races. Faylona could even be called an unusual case. Thinking such things, I gave my wallet to Faylona. Aah I wonder how much will it cost. No matter how much I earned after coming here, I doubt it'd be enough to buy a few horses though.

"C'mon, let's go."

"Un, Got it."

"Yes."

It seems, Miss Francesca is also coming with us.

It'd be easier with a magician so frankly I'm relieved.

[As expected, it's easier living along with people.]

I was slightly surprised from the sudden words.

It's rare for Ermenhilde to say something like that.

[Like this, Renji is going on a monster subjugation quest due to the influence of people.]

"Please stop talking like it's a good thing. I don't like either fighting or monster subjugation."

It's dangerous, it hurts when you get injured and you might even die. And it's the same for my comrades as well.

That's why I want to live carefreely while gathering herbs only. But the world is cruel, before I realized I was going on another monster subjugation quest.

Hunting the black Orc with Miss Francesca, and that black Ogre and the army goblins. And that Demon as well. I am working a bit too much recently. Just when I thought I could finally relax, this time I have to escort this white girl to the capital. Because the witch of the capital—Utano-san is involved, I'll feel bad to abandon her.

"What happened suddenly?"

“My chatty friend said something strange.”

When I answered that Mururu who came up to me and asked what happened, she made a puzzled face and looked up at me.

Well, it’s a normal reaction considering she can’t hear Ermenhilde. Maybe because Miss Francesca remembered how she was the same back then, she started laughing.

“Renji, you’re strange.”

“I’m told that a lot.”

[.....and everytime you’re told that, I wonder, is it really fine like that?]

Well not really but it’s better than being relied on as Hero.

Even if you expect something Heroic from me, I have very few things I can do. I can only fight. That too, only a bit stronger than normal adventurers.

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Along with Miss Francesca and Mururu, I left the district. There’s not even a need to look for goblins. They’ll appear themselves as long as you go a bit away from the highway and into the grasslands.

Normally, that is. Today, it was a bit different. The existence of Mururu lessened the difficulty of the goblin hunting quest.

“There. Found them.”

“Amazing, Mururu-chan.”

“.....this much, even children at the village can do.”

She said that but she must be happy to have been complimented since her tail was swaying energetically underneath her cloak.

On looking to where Mururu told, I could confirm 3 goblins with my

sight. Mururu was finding them so easily because of her sense of smell. It could be said as one of the special abilities of Beastmen.

Beastmen's physical abilities exceed us humans or demi-human's abilities by a huge gap. It's the same with the sharpness of the 5 senses as well. Their arm strength, leg strength etc are also in a different level. And they're like that from when they're children as well. An adult beastman is in a totally different level. On the other hand, they cannot use any kind of magic at all. It's not like they don't have magical energy, yet they can't even use spirit magic. One theory suggests that they're using all of their magical energy in enhancing their physical abilities which is why they are so physically strong.

While crouching and hiding among the waist-tall grass, I was astonished at their physical skills.

"Even though you have a small body, you really are full-fledged beastwoman."(renji)

"I have even completed the ceremony for becoming an adult after all."

Saying that, she puffed her chest somewhat proudly. It was so childish it felt really cute. Why do feel so happy seeing her I wonder.

Unlike Demi-humans, beastmen have a life span similar to humans. Going by her looks, she should be about 14 yrs old. Now that I think about it, Souichi and others were also around this age when we were summoned.

"Mururu-chan is treated as an adult among Beastmen already?"(fran)

"That's right. The ceremony of adulthood for beastmen is not conducted by age but by physical strength. Winning against specific monsters, gathering materials, by doing such things you have to gain the approval from your comrades to be accepted as an adult."

The ceremony of adulthood. It's not age based like with humans. It differs with each race but mainly it involves defeating monsters alone. Those not suited to fighting are supposed to gather some specific material instead. The monster involved in such subjugation is usually

either goblins or Orcs so Mururu should be used to fighting alone against monsters of that level.

As I explained that, both looked at me surprised.

“You know a lot.”

“I have also gone through that ceremony. Well in our case it was not to be acknowledged as an Adult but to be acknowledged as a comrade instead though.”

It should actually be said that we got dragged into doing it to be exact.

On the Elfreim continent, to gain their trust we were asked to hunt the monster that was said to be the master of one part of the forest. As expected, I didn’t do it alone but with Souichi and others.

Later on we were told that normally you don’t face such boss-class monster but have to fight mere goblins usually. Basically, rather than ceremony, we were simply used to get rid of their troubles.

“Is that so?”

“I may not look like it but I have lived a HARD.....hard life after all.”(T/N the caps are because Renji says it in English at first then realises that they won’t get it so switches to jap.)

[Seriously.....]

For some reason, Ermenhilde made a tired sigh. Well, I really am spending a hard life. From a normal salaryman to saving the world.

If I kept on thinking in that direction I’d get depressed again so I gave a sigh and looked towards the goblins who had yet to sense us.

“Will you be fine with Goblins?”(renji)

“Yeah, no problem. I can take even more.....even 5 of them pretty easily.”(mururu)

“That’s reassuring.”

She must have realized what I meant to say since her atmosphere changed.

Her small body wrapped in the cloak felt like it became bigger. Her careless, gentle looking eyes suddenly turned dangerous and shined. Her legs got covered with white fur completely. Probably, her arms beneath the cloak are the same.

Battle stance. I looked towards the goblin again, it seems they have still not noticed us but are looking around probably due to sensing a strong presence in the surroundings.

Miss Francesca was also surprised from the sudden change in Mururu. I wonder if they teach the ecology of beastmen in Magic Academies? Even if they do, there still won't be any magician who won't get interested in seeing this first hand.

"Can I hunt them now?"(mururu)

"That's the job."

"Got it."

Answering lightly like that, she ran at an incredible speed towards the goblins.

[Will she be fine?]

Well, who knows. I took this request to check that as well. We will travel together from hereon after all, I need to know how well can she fight, what things she can do.

After seeing her enjoying back off, I tuned towards Miss Francesca next.

"Was it your first time seeing a Beastwoman?"

"Ye,s.....at first I thought they won't be much different from humans."

"They only look similar. Except for the ears and tail that is."

But when they enter a battle, they completely change.

From faraway, I heard a *gii* screaming sound.

When I turned to look there, Mururu had already taken down one of the goblins. That said, I can't really confirm. I could only tell that because the 3 goblins I could see from this faraway had lessened to two.

Then, the white shadow that Mururu jumped to an incredible height and lunged at the next goblin.

The last one disappeared into the grass just like that. It was probably pulled and knocked down by the beast called Mururu. That fighting style was truly befitting a beast.

I breathed a sigh at the sudden turn of events and Miss Francesca seemed to be at a loss for words.

“Amazing.”

I could only say that.

Frankly, she might be stronger than me at such a young age. I felt like I’d lose confidence again.

Whether it be Souichi and group or her, why are the children around me so strong? Do I even have any position/status here?

“She’s amazing.”(fran)

“Yeah.”

Saying that, I walked out of the grass I was hiding in.

Mururu was waiting there, untainted with any blood, for us to get there. Even though she’s a close combat fighter like me, how good is she to avoid getting any blood on her, this white girl?

The dangerous glint in her eyes was gone showing that she had calmed down now. But underneath the fluttering cloak, her arms were not thin ones like a normal girl but were covered with pure white fur till her elbows. And even more unusual were the 4 knife like long claws growing from her hands. Right now only her right hand had undergone the transformation but normally both of her hands should be like that.

That appearance was definitely not of a human. It proved that this girl belonged to a completely different species, the Beastmen.

Miss Francesca beside me gulped but as someone even slightly used to seeing beastmen, they’d find this pure fight girl to be extremely beautiful instead.

A sublime, noble beauty that humans can never possess. Coupled with the strength she showed just now, it made her look extremely charming.

“All that’s left is..”(renji)

Hiding my emotions, I drew my knife from its sheath. Opening the mouth of the goblin that Mururu defeated, I cut off one of its fangs with my knife.

“If you take this back to the guild’s reception, you’ll get a reward in return.”

“That’s Renji’s job?”

“Not just me, but of every adventurers’.”

As I gave a l8ight explanation, I began taking off the equipment from the goblins. It’s my usual job after every fight. Though it was Mururu who actually defeated these ones.

[.....Could you not act like a bandit at least this time?]

“Also, you can sell of such equipment for money as well.”

[Oi Renji? It’s your first time fighting with this beastwoman. At least try acting like a Hero for once please?]

While ignoring Ermenhilde who kept saying such things, I took off the equipment from the goblins.

If only acting like a Hero would fill my wallet as well I wouldn’t have minded it. But it doesn’t and what’s more important right now is money rather than the honour of a hero. You can’t eat with just honour after all.....If I said something like “I’m a Hero.” Then I might get a meal in villages maybe but that in itself is ridiculous to do as a human.

Anyway, it’s a pity that the only useable weapon here is a short sword. That too has a chip in its blade. I doubt we’ll get much from selling this. I could only sigh.

“I see.”(mururu)

“I don’t think many adventurers do all that though.....”(fran)

“When you don’t have money, this is a major source of income.”

[How deplorable.....]

Thereafter, we had Mururu search for Goblins and me and Miss Francesca also joined the fighting.

That said, it was difficult for us to keep up with Mururu’s speed. She’s fast and strong. It was easier to move seperately from her rather than matching along with her. Frankly speaking, the difference in physical ability is a bit too much.

It once again made me realize the difference between humans and Beastmen. Probably, not even Faylona would be able to keep up with her.

“We fought quite a lot but.....are you fine?”(fran)

“Yeah, I’m almost at my limit.”(renji)

2 long swords on my waist, 1 short sword on the other side of the waist. An iron shield on my left hand, and 2 battleaxes on my back. The total weight was probably a bit more than 40kgs. Rather than saying heavy, it was difficult to even move my body. My body is well trained from the constant travelling but this is still taking away most of my stamina. If I did not have the Cheat given to me, I probably wouldn’t have been able to even move.

My breathing has become rough but I can go on a bit more. I really want to return quickly. How the hell do fantasy protagonists walk around so easily with much more stuff in their bags? If I had wished the goddess that I wanted to become like the protagonist of a fantasy story, I wonder how I would have become?

While thinking of that, I distracted my mind from the strain.

[You’re just too greedy.]

“This much should fill up our wallets pretty well.”

“Rather than such things, my claws cut better. How is that even useful, that blunt thing?”

Mururu who said that was also holding a boorish club and a sword, that

didn't suit her small body, in her hands as well.

It's lesser than what I have but still she doesn't even seem to feel a little weight from that. I felt like making her carry half of what I had but quickly threw away that thought. That would be low of me both as an adult and as a man.

"Earning money means you have to collect such things that can be sold."

".....I really can't understand humans."

"I don't think that's exactly correct though."(fran)

[You're definitely wrong here, Renji.]

Oh shut up. We have to leave tomorrow so we have to earn as much as possible by today.

We have acquired provisions, and we should get horses as well. But there are many other things like herbs and medicines needed in a journey. There's no such thing as having too much money.

Normally, I wouldn't work this hard but since we have strict schedule I want to be ready for any unforeseen circumstances. Not to mention that 9i have been getting involved into too many troublesome things these days.

Thinking all that.....I feel tired again. I wonder if I'll be able to even move tomorrow.

After returning to the Magic City, I first went straight to the item shop to sell off the equipment gotten from goblins. When I put down all the equipment on his counter, the shopkeeper shouted in surprise. Well it can't be helped, after all normally an adventurer doesn't come up with so much equipment to sell after going to just one hunt.

Though it earns you money, it's also bulky and difficult to carry back to the city. It also becomes a hindrance while fighting and if you drop it just to fight then collecting it all back is a pain on its own. And, most of the equipment can't be used readily since monster don't maintain their

weapons. That's why people prefer hunting more monsters instead of gathering items from every monster. Most adventurers find the former to be more efficient after all.

After that, I submitted the goblin fangs at the guild and took our reward. As expected, with three of us, we had hunted quite a lot of them so the sum was pretty good. The expenses for the travel were still bigger though.

"Oh right, Mururu, where have you been sleeping till now?"

"Outdoors."

I should have known. Miss Francesca was really surprised but I wasn't that much since I expected this answer.

She was broke and has no idea how money works. Not to mention beastmen are natural hunters that live in the wild. They really have no problem with sleeping outdoors.

"Here."

Saying that, I handed Mururu with some of the money we earned in a pouch.

I handed one to Miss Francesca as well. She refused at first but when I said that it was fine, she accepted it. Well, she helped us so its only normal though.

"This is?"(mururu)

"Reward from the request. This is the money you have earned after today's work."

She looked at the pouch with a curious gaze and checked its weight and whatnot.

It looked so amusing that even while knowing it was rude of me, I ended up laughing.

"So, you can eat things other than dried meat with this as well."(renji)

"I see. Earning like this and then use it for food, is it?"(mururu)

“No, money is used not just for food but……”

If I start explaining about ‘shopping’ to her now, I’ll really get tired.

Hunting goblins, gathering equipment, selling it at the city……..honestly, I’m really tired already. I want to go back to my inn and just sleep.

Sitting on a wooden stool at the guild, I breathed a sigh. Aah, I’m really tired.

[You just find explaining a pain don’t you?]

“Let’s meet up with Faylona and decide when to meet tomorrow already. I’m soo tired.”

“…..Mouu.”(fran)

Saying that, Miss Francesca began explaining various uses of money to Mururu.

Well, whatever. Leaving that aside, I began thinking of other things. I wonder what Faylona is doing right now. He’s taking too much time to buy just horses. Did he also go on hunting alone maybe?

[Fuu, we sure worked a lot today.]

“You did absolutely nothing though?”

Taking Ermenhilde out of my pocket, I flicked it.

“Hmm.”

It was Heads.

“It’d be nice if something good happens.”

While looking at the counter, I muttered so. But I think it’d be difficult.

Probably, we won’t be able to hire a magician. There are many better requests than the one I put up. A normal magician wouldn’t accept mine.

That’s why I decided not to think of such depressing things.

But next, I thought of our journey. We’ll be moving with horses but frankly speaking, riding on horses is really painful. Even after I’ve gotten used to it, it’s physically taxing to travel long distances on horses.

Basically, your butt, or rather, your whole lower body starts hurting. And if you push it, your whole body starts hurting as well.

Thinking about it, I ended up sighing again.

Beside me, the former newbie Miss Francesca was teaching the newbie adventurer Mururu about the uses of money. That scene looked so pleasant, it healed me.

“It’s peaceful.”

[You were fighting goblins only a few hours ago though.]

.....My partner really lacks dreams.

Interlude 4 The Sage's Part/Act

*

Looking over the documents handed to me this morning, an confirming that there were no problems with it, I signed them to begin my today's work. If there were any unclear points, I would call the person in charge and ask for an explanation. After the Demon God's subjugation had been completed, I, Utano Yuuko took a job in Imnesia continent that made me a superior to others. Even I myself think that it really doesn't suit me though.

Recently, I have been spending everyday like this. While rubbing my eyes, I breathed a sigh. When was the last time I left the castle town even?

No, when was the last time that I simply relaxed all day as well? Thinking that, I looked up to the ceiling wondering what the hell was I doing with my life.

Even though I am praised as a Sage, a Hero and whatnot, inside I'm still a normal human.

I get tired when I use my brains too much, and I get irritated if I don't get to move my body much. But now that the Demon God had been killed, what was necessary was not brawn but brains. And ability to guide the people.

Unfortunately, I was given the job to deal with domestic affairs, or rather, to give others various jobs. One year after the subjugation of the Demon God, I was appointed as the Municipal Head of this country—the Imnesia Kingdom. Rather than saying that I had talent for this, this worlds domestic and diplomatic policy levels were so much lower than

modern society that my ideas seemed extremely novel and revolutionary to them.. Being continuously threatened by the Demon God, only their military and war related skills developed. There was no kind of activities made for pleasure or fun, and most of the land was in control of nobles and not put under the management of a farmer who could work on it.

Production and manufacturing is mainly related to weapons and armours. Other things like stylish clothing or ornaments were made only for the noble brag about them. Though the price of such articles was one of the reasons why they were not popular with commoners but above all, they simply did not have the time to waste on such things.

The threat of monsters was still there, even the demons were still alive. Though the people were given a temporary sense of freedom with the subjugation of the Demon God, it's not like their lives completely changed. There were too many people who had lost their families and place to work due top monster attacks.

Though I have knowledge, I don't have the experience to manage such jobs properly. Even if I want to open up a orphanage, I don't know what things are necessary. Thanks to all that, I am spending everyday where my head hurts constantly. I am clearly not suited for this. Shouldn't these guys pick a better experienced person for this? Well, at least they help me when I ask for advice in such matters.

Recently, I do feel that I've gotten a bit used to this job as well but still I have a long way to go.

There are a lot of things to do at the royal capital. Maintenance of the highways, repairs of the city walls etc. We still have to shift homeless to permanent houses, distribute provisions to orphans and also collect reasonable taxes from the surrounding villages as well.

Right now there is one in the capital only but sooner or later I want to set up orphanages in the villages as well. Not just farmlands, I want to create mills and factories as well. There's a huge availability of land and personnel so I have to try that.

Today as well, I'll have to face off the huge amount of documents.

Thinking that I felt like crying a bit.

"I should have also left on a journey like a certain someone....."

I muttered but there was no response to that.

The office I have been provided with is huge but I'm the only one here. My thoughts were too unique for the people of this world so there's no one who could converse with me.

No, I don't lack communication skills, the people of this world are simply that thickheaded. Thanks to that, not a single man tries to even flirt with me. They simply don't have a good discerning eye in my opinion though.

A few bookshelves and a work table. A sofa and table for visitors. In the simple kitchen, only a teapot with tea leaves had been prepared. Maids would keep the room clean but documents scattered around the table were a bit too much. It's not like I'm bad at keeping things tidy but when you have to deal with so many documents everyday, it becomes like this normally. I'll say this again but I'm definitely not bad at keeping things tidy alright?.....I'm not good at it either though.

snap As I snapped my fingers, a book flew out from one of the bookshelves and floated down into my arms. It was the magic [Float]. My cheat is [to be able to use any magic from any manga, anime, novel or games]. It's super convenient but because it is so convenient I feel like I'm not getting enough physical exercise nowadays. Insufficient exercise is the arch enemy for a woman. Especially for your weight and body figure.

Thinking like that, I decided to change my thoughts so I opened the book. I'll lose if I let that get to me. I think I should start exercising a bit from tomorrow.

"Let's see....."

Even this country has things like Department of Finance and Department of Infrastructure so as long as I sign the document, I can leave the rest to the specific specialised department.

It's not like I could do everything alone anyway. I'm already at my limit in the first place, if I were made to lead all the departments alone, I'd probably break completely. Mentally.

"Hmm?"

When I was about to begin reading, I felt a disturbance in the magic of the room.

It was simply a matter of my senses, it's not like an incident occurred or anything. It's just that normally magicians of this world use magical energy existing inside their bodies but me and one other magician use the magical energy brought forth from the world itself.

This feeling was a signal that the other magician like me was affecting this room.

"Do you need something, Koutarou-kun?"

For a few seconds, nothing happened. But the disturbance in magical energy kept on growing.

I guess he's coming here using [teleport] but I wonder what happened. He is one of the 13 GodSlayers like me, Inoue Koutarou aka [Demonic Eye Holder] [The Wizard].

After some time, in the empty space, a human figure appeared and soon took full shape.

".....What's with that getup?"(yuuko)

"Fu—-with this, nobody would recognise me right?"(koutarou)

"You're just wearing a ragged robe all over your body."

"To think that you wouldn't understand the merits of this....."

I could only sigh in amazement.

While saying that, the one who appeared was man dressed in ragged clothes. Well, true in that kind of getup one wouldn't be able to tell whether he's a man or woman as long as he doesn't talk. In fact, Koutarou-kun does have a thin figure for a man so one might think of

him as tall lady?.....maybe not.

He was covered in a ragged robe from head to toe and only his lip portion was visible. You'll make the room more dusty so really stop.

Or rather, how should I say this.....he looks so shabby. It's not like he is lacking money either.

I really can't understand this child's clothing sense. Even when we travelling, he'd pick clothes that showed his skin. That led to him getting insect bites, and getting cut from the branches of trees as well. I really hope he'd take more care of himself.

"So why are you in that ragged getup again? Trying to act like a suspicious person?(yuuko)

"What the heck.....Didn't I just say? In this getup, nobody would recognise who I was so its easier to move around!"

It's amazing he didn't get arrested like that. What are the royal guards doing? I thought about about reducing their salaries inside my head. Well, even if they did try to catch him, he'd just [Teleport] away anyway. Even like this he's still one of the Heroes after all. Even his physical abilities are above those of other people in this world.

"So what did you come here for? Sorry but I'm really busy right now so I can't play along with you.....Are you here to help Yuuta-kun maybe?"(yuuko)

Kuuki Yuuta-kun was a knight of this country and also one of the 13 Heroes. He was the vice commander of the Knight Order famous as the [The Shield Knight]. It's been only one year since he entered the order but due to his achievement as one who had saved the world, he was promoted to the position of vice commander in half a year. He's working hard everyday even now it seems.

Also, in terms of ability he even surpasses the strongest knight of this country, O'brien, so he'd probably become the commander soon or later.

Right now he's acting as the aide to the commander and also learning the various jobs of the commander at the same time. It'll be weird if he

was suddenly made the commander and asked to lead the whole knight order, so this is for the best. Yuuta-kun isn't hated by anyone in his surroundings so he seems to be spending everyday happily. I'm jealous. I also want to work my body a little.

"If you're here for money, they'll give you salary as well you know?"(yuuko)

"I'll pass. I'm not that free. And neither am I short on money."

Then why the hell are you in those worn out clothes? If you just wanted to hide your identity, just dress in full black like assassins in games.

"If you're not here to pass time, quickly tell me why you came? I'm really busy you know."

Saying that, I swung the documents in front of Koutarou-kun. Lots of paperwork unrelated to any domestic affairs was waiting for me.

"……You really lack fun in your life. You should enjoy conversing like this more."

"Like I said, I'm not free. Do you just want someone to talk to?"

"No. I'm here to borrow your knowledge."

"Mine?"

Did some kind of trouble occur? When I looked at him questioningly, he removed his robe.

What appeared was silver hair and heterochromatic eyes, one gold and one red. It's a result of asking the goddess to change his appearance as soon as he came to this world. An androgynous face and physique, silver hair, a red right eye and a golden left eye. He really looked like someone from a fantasy world. Or rather, even in this world, he was the only one with this kind of appearance.

"My Demonic Eye showed Renji-dono's future, it seems he will face danger……."(koutaoru)

"It's not the first time Yamada-kun will get into danger."

I cut off his words instantly.

Also, how should I say this but, Koutarou-kun's [Demonic Eye of Future Sight] had a varied accuracy. No, I guess I should say that there is no one specific future. This is nothing but knowledge from my original world but the future was like the various branches of a tree. There was not one but infinte futures that could take place.

Especially, among us——[The Brave] Souichi-kun, the [Demonic Sword User] Hisaki Masaki-chan and Yamada-kun whose powers are a bit set apart from the norm, prediction of these people's future is mostly incorrect.

Even if you say that Yamada-kun is in danger, I guess he must be getting involved into another troublesome case, that's all I feel. In fact, he's been like that from the very beginning. Even when someone predicts his life will be in danger, he would always come out alive. Even if the opponent was a high level Demon, or the Demon Lord, or the Demon God. He would struggle endlessly, get back up desperately, and do all he could to hide his fear.

But well.....

"So, what about Yamada-kun? Is it related to this request from the Spirit God you told me about a little back?"

"Umu. They'll probably leave the Magic City tomorrow but they'll face a Demon god's descandant during their travels."

"Again? He fought one with Souichi and others as well right? And he fought one at a rural village as well it seems."

Saying that, I picked the mithril sword kept near my table. The purple amethyst at the end of the handle was a proof that it was Yamada-kun's sword.

And Yamada-kun had sold this sword to a weapon shop in some village. Before the king or the knight order could find it, I bought it back with my pocket money. I'll charge him for that money, definitely. It seems he's poor, so I'll just make him work somewhere.

It'll be punishment for pushing such a troublesome job on me, leaving the kids alone and going around saving random people in the countryside. Saving even strangers is one his virtues but that doesn't mean he can neglect us. I'm not going to forgive him so easily.

When I started thinking like that, rather than my work load, my irritation towards Yamada-kun became bigger. In the first place, that man is too selfish. Even though he has a position like an elder brother, a father and a guardian to others.....he'd always get himself injured by rushing to the frontlines. It's good that he wants to protect the kids but how much does he want to make us worry for him? He's the model for a useless adult. But even then, it can't be helped that we all trust him and found that part of him to be very attractive. His hard working nature is really great.....I feel like I lost somehow so I should change my thoughts.

Even though he's the weakest, he doesn't accept that he's also the most unique among us.

Among us 13, he was the only one who made the correct choice, he uses that power not for himself but for others. As a result, he alone bears the grudge and hatred of all the Demons for the sin of killing the Demon God. Even though we are celebrated as GodSlayers and as heroes, the demons only hate Yamada-kun who killed the Demon God and not all of us 13.

How many women have cried for that man. That fact that I'm also one of them is really not funny. What kind of man makes a woman cry and then leaves her as well? That too for a whole year?

Soon he'll be coming to the Royal Capital for the Spirit God's request, or rather as escort for the Beastman who took that request. I hope you're ready Yamada Renji, I'll catch you and work you to your bones for this.

The martial arts tournament was also coming close. That will be the first place to start.

While I was deciding all that, Koutarou-kun taken a few steps backwards.

"What is it?"(yuuko)

“No, nothing at all ma’am.”

Why so formal suddenly? This kid’s speaking patterns change like that suddenly, its really amusing.

Putting the Mithril sword back on the table, I breathed a sigh.

“So, what was that about Yamada-kun?”

“Ahem.....While heading to the capital, he’ll be attacked by a descendant of Demon God.”

“Oh right, that.”

I’m not really worried about Yamada-kun being in danger.

“If its Yamada-kun he’ll probably make it through but are you really that worried?”(yuuko)

“My right eye, well, it predicted his death.”

“.....I see.”

Death. That isn’t gentle at all.

But I can’t move away from here either. There are things only I can do here. And I’m not going to be the one to go and meet him even though he was the one who neglected me for so long. Though the latter part is the main reason, but the former is important as well.

“Just leave him alone.”(yuuko)

“How heartless. As expected of the great Witch.”

“I’ll slap you.”

“I’m very sorry.”

When I said that with a smile, he apologised instantly. Good, I like honest children.

Seeing Koutarou-kun and his unstable character, I felt relaxed. Who’s a witch? I even think that I’m more suited to be called the Saint than Yayoi-chan.....No, that’ll be painful in its own way.

“Well if its Yamada-kun, he should be fine right?”(yuuko)

“.....Really?”

“How many times has it been that your right eye has foreseen Yamada-kun’s death?”

When I asked that, his gaze turned blank and he started counting on his fingers.

First he went through all five fingers in his right hand then all five of his left as well.....

“I have no idea how many times it has been.”(kou)

“Exactly.”

He was more unique than Souichi-kun, who is the [Brave] and the [swordswoman] Masaki-chan who wished to have the power to even cut through fate itself, there was no such thing as a definite future.

The power to not lose against anyone. The power to cut through fate itself. Both were incredibly powerful abilities. Depending on how its used, they could rival even the Demon lord in pure strength. But the power of will may allow you to cross your own limits but you cannot cross the limits of a human, or so I think. Compared to that, what Yamada-kun wished for was for a weapon to kill Gods. The power to kill Gods. It was Aya-chan who asked for power rivalling that of Gods that stand above all life, but it was only in terms of magical energy. It was only Yamada-kun who asked the power to surpass even Gods. Its meaning, its result, we saw it one year ago. That’s why we/I can trust him.

“He’ll reach the capital safe and sound. Definitely.”

“That’d be great but.”

“Just trust him. He’s our leader after all.”

The person himself would definitely deny that though, he didn’t wish for that either.

.....but the man called Yamada Renji was definitely our leader. That won’t change even now. Even after he disappeared, he will always be our leader.....for he is the strongest among us all.

It's not like he had some kind of charisma, it's not like he always made the right decisions. We failed together so many times. We the wrong choice so many times. But even then the only reason we didn't break was because he stood in front of us, for he would lead the children with him always. With Ermenhilde in his hands, even though he could fight at full strength only against the Demon God, still he would stand in front of us.

And all the Heroes would chase after his back. He gave us a sense of relief. Maybe that was what he wished for as well. Maybe that was the ideal he had in his mind as well. As an adult, as the oldest, a life which he could be proud of. He always said that.

"He's the Hero Protagonist of the story. He won't die."

"I'm jealous of Yuuko-dono who has so much faith in him. It'd be nice if I could also be like him as well."

Everyone says that. I guess all men wish to become the center of their party, eh?

From Yamada-kun's perspective that position seems to be the hardest, most painful and heavy though. I could only smile wryly at that.

"Then work harder. 'Hero' is a verb. Not a title——if you want to become the protagonist, you can only continue to act like a hero."(yuuko)

"Umu."

"Also——Astrarea is always watching over Yamada-kun, he'll be fine."

".....Yeah, that's right."

I recalled that overprotective, ill-natured Goddess.

I don't know which heartstrings of hers were pulled but that Goddess has affection for Yamada-kun. A goddess who loves a God slayer.

"But still, my eye shows Renji-dono's death.."

When he said till that, I snapped my fingers.

The next moment, Koutarou-kun disappeared from my sights. Activating [Teleport] magic, I made him fly away. His destination was the

centre of the Spirit forest in Elfreim continent. By the side of the World Tree. There might be a be few miscalculations but he won't be far away from there. Probably.

Yamada-kun's death he says, death. If you're that worried, lend him a hand even if its just from the sidelines. With koutarou-kun's abilities, he should be able to lend a hand without making others realize his presence. And also to return from the Elfreim continent.

"Seriously. I'm really busy you know."

Opening the book in my hand, I turned the page.

Construction of the orphanage, providing jobs to vagrants, restoration of the capital, monster subjugation, diplomacy with Elfreim——-and many other things are left for me to do.

I don't need a over talkative Wizard with me but it'd be great if I can get some actual help.

Hurry up and come to the Capital Yamada-kun. I'm waiting for you with lots of work.

Chapter 26 Road to the Capital (3)

*

While attaching our luggage to the Horses' saddle, I yawned when my eyes met Miss Francesca's. Feeling embarrassed, I tried to hide it by concentrating on arranging our luggage.

Early mornings during the fall season were chilly and the sky was still dim and gloomy.

"Renji-san, do you need help somewhere?"

While I was preparing near the city gate, the girl behind me asked me that.

"No, I'm fine. Or rather, me and Feirona are enough for the preparations so you can rest some more, you know?" (T/N: Faylona = Feirona now as per the official english in the illustrations.)

"No……I'm fine. Even I have gotten somewhat used to travelling now."

"Well, I know that."

While answering her, I wondered why did it end up like this for nth time. Even though I actually know the reason as well.

I looked at the girl behind me who was crouching and packing things in a bag right now; Fuyou Aya. One of the 13 Heroes, the genius known as the [Grand Magus].

……Why did she accept such a request which has basically zero reward?

Well, I can somehow guess the reason but I'm not really sure. That's why I end up hesitating to ask her directly as well. Because I know Aya herself would be troubled on how to answer that if I asked her something like that. What does the girl Fuyou Aya expect from the man called Yamada Renji? Neither I nor Aya herself have yet to settle on an answer

to that.

It's weird that we're still travelling together even though its like that. I did try to persuade her otherwise as well. There would be no reward, she'd miss her classes as well and there's even the job of transporting that Demon to the capital 1 week later. I don't think she'd have the time to stick with us, but...

"Still, you're ready to come with us?"(renji)

"Yes."

It was an instant answer. I could only sigh. It'd be useless to say anything more so I gave up. I already tried enough. She won't listen to me even if I asked her not to now anyway. Not to mention, I'd make her mood worse as well. If that happened, worse case, I'd end up in a hole in the middle of the city.....I believe she wouldn't do that to me but since there have been past cases of multiple men who have suffered that so I can't be certain.

I felt like Ermenhilde was laughing inside my pocket. Must be my imagination.

"After all, you took a request with Souichi and Yayoi but.....It's not fair.(aya)

"Even if you tell me that.."

They were there so it had ended up like that. It's not like I was biased in any way, and if the chance had appeared I would have done a quest with Aya as well. Well, it's true that I didn't invite her though. Her pouting appearance looked really cute but if I knew things would end up like this, I would have invited her back then.

Well, even in that case, she would have probably joined us with a different excuse. It's a fact though that her coming with us will be a really great help to be honest. Leaving mine and Aya's circumstances aside, her ability is the real thing. Much greater than me or Miss Francesca. You could say that she was in a different level.

[At times like these, you should just be honest you know?]

“The fact that I can’t is one of the pains that come with being an adult.”

“What the heck does that even mean?”(aya)

Saying that, Aya giggled.

Seeing her like that, I could only sigh while drooping my shoulders.

“I don’t want you to do dangerous stuff and as a student I want you to be studying at school, is what I mean.”

“It’s fine. I’m actually pretty smart you know?”

Lifting her bag on her shoulders, she looked at me with a serene smile. Trust—I can feel her trust in me from her gaze. I’ve seen that gaze countless times during our journey. That’s why I can’t reject it now either. But I still questioned whether I actually had enough strength to be called worthy of receiving that smile. I, can only work hard and try my best to answer her smile, her trust. But the gap between our powers wouldn’t disappear.

“My studies will also be fine. Also……if I get into trouble, help me again alright?”(aya)

But Aya still said something like that to me with a smile. Those words were definitely said because she remembers the promise I once made to her long back.

Rustling my hair, I averted my gaze. That was embarrassing. In fact, I want you to help me…….But I can’t say that since I’m the guy and the adult here. I can’t ask a girl younger than me to protect me after all.

“……”

“……..um, your reply?”(aya)

Now then, how should I answer that? Thinking, I looked towards Miss Francesca who was glancing towards us. Feirona and Mururu didn’t care about us and were busy doing their packing. I’m thankful for that. Miss Francesca must be wondering why a hero like Aya chose to accept such a request I guess. Well, the reason’s nothing more than the fact that I and Aya know each other.

The meeting place I had put in the request was the city's east gate but when I got there, I really was surprised since Aya was there waiting for us. Apparently, even Souichi was perfectly okay with Aya coming with us. Well, that guy is Aya's ally before anything.....though there's also the part where he really can't go against Aya as well. Please try to be a bit more stronger, Souichi.

Well, certainly this is a great help for us but how am I supposed to explain why a Hero was taking part in this quest to others? I wonder how much would it normally cost to hire a Hero to do your request?

I wasn't even expecting anyone. Worst case we three, Feirona, me and Mururu, alone would be journeying alone or so I thought. It was already a great surprise when Miss Francesca decided to accept that request. Though that itself was pretty weird. Why would she even accept such a dangerous request?

According to the person herself, she just wants to have an adventure. But the details were even more interesting.

Soon, Miss Francesca would graduate from school. As a noble daughter, she'd have very less freedom after that. After all, nobles have various duties of their own. After she graduates she won't get any chance to go on something like an adventure. I doubt her family would even allow something like that.

I have quite a few nobles in my list of acquaintances as well. I remember that they didn't have much freedom either. Thinking that way, Miss Francesca has actually received quite a lot freedom. I guess there'd be quite a lot of nobles who wouldn't see that as good but that's her problem to deal with. I can't help with that.

This journey would be dangerous, it could even be fatal for her. While understanding that, she still wants to come with us so I can't really refuse her. It's better to have as much firepower as possible after all.

"I'm done with the preparations. What about you?"

"Yeah, I'm done as well."

I called Feirona and it seems they're done with prep as well and were walking towards us. Aya's gaze felt like it became stronger towards me but I didn't pay it any heed. Unfortunately, I've decided to stop saying extremely embarrassing phrases from now on. In the first place, only heroes have the right to say those kinds of lines. They're too heavy for me.

We had bought 3 horses. Feirona on one horse, Mururu and Miss Francesca on one and me and Aya on the last. I would have preferred to have Miss Francesca behind me but if I had said that, let alone falling in a hole, I feel like I would've been burnt to death.

Thinking such stuff, I turned towards Mururu. She's making a somewhat sleepy face probably because she's not a morning person. Even though we're leaving on a difficult journey, I felt calming down a bit seeing her face.

"Wake up, Mururu. It's to depart."

"Un—I'm fine."

You definitely don't look fine at all though. Miss Francesca shook her by her shoulders to wake her up but that only made her head to sway front and back. Her ponytail also swayed along with it making it look amusing.

When I looked towards Feirona, he shrugged his shoulders as if troubled. I'm not really minding it since I only feel calmer due to her.

"Leaving the sleepy girl aside, I look forward to working with you, Aya-dono."(elf)

"Yes, same here."

Like that, Feirona and Aya did a formal introduction to each other. But even though it didn't feel very stiff probably because of their personalities.

While I was thinking that, I felt something pull my mantle. On looking, it was Mururu.

"What is it?"(renji)

“Who?”

She asked that while pointing towards Aya.....So she really doesn’t know. I am one thing but it was surprising that she didn’t recognise even Aya. At that Miss Francesca panicked and hurriedly explained her about Aya. Well, it’s not like Aya’d get angry just because Mururu didn’t recognise her you know? She’s not that narrow minded. In fact Aya would find it better to be honest.

It’s really tiresome to be treated as a Hero constantly. Mentally, that is. I think Aya is of the same opinion since she looked at Mururu and Francesca with a troubled expression.

“.....a Hero chosen by the Goddess.”

I don’t know how Miss Francesca explained her but that was how Mururu described Aya now.

“Nice to meet you, um.....”(aya)

“Mururu.”

“I see. Nice to meet you, Mururu.”

“Likewise.”

While smiling wryly, Aya greeted Mururu. Mururu didn’t seem to be on guard against Aya either and greeted her back as well.

“So we’re done with the pleasantries?”(renji)

“Yeah. Let’s depart quickly.”(elf)

“un.”(mururu)

Mururu nodded at Feirona’s words and we split in our respective groups.

Originally, Mururu was supposed to be with me and Aya with Miss Francesca but Aya changed that. The reason.....as an adult I shouldn’t pry too deeply into that. But I should say that even I wouldn’t get feelings for a child like Mururu in any case.

The horses in this world were more robust and strong-built ones like in armies ratehr than the racehorses we see normally. They were strong

enough to carry two grown humans along with luggage and still have enough stamina to run. But in exchange, they weren't that fast though still much faster than walking. Sitting on the saddle made for two first, I extended my hand towards Aya.

Taking my hand, and using that as a fulcrum, she skilfully sat on the saddle. When someone has good looks, they sure look beautiful even while doing the most mundane of actions.

On glancing towards miss Francesca and Mururu, they had also climbed on their horse. Miss Francesca was in her usual travel clothes along with her leather breastplate and Mururu was wrapped in her white cloak. But since she was on a horse, her volptuous thighs were visible to the eye from under the cloak.

While I was looking at that, Aya suddenly pinched me from behind. It actually hurt a bit.

"I leave the horse riding to you."(aya)

"Hm, yeah."

Giving a short reply, I made the horse start running. If I were to give some excuse, I'd only be dragged deeper into the swamp after all. I know that from my own life experience. A good man doesn't make the mistake twice. Probably.

The guard on the gate was surprised by my and Aya's appearance but I decided to ignore him. After I'm done with this request, I should probably retire to some rural village once again. I don't want to stand out like this any longer after all.

[What were you doing?]

"Nothing weird, really."

When I said that, I heard a sigh from inside my pocket. I really am not trusted at all.

"Souichi looks at Francesca-senpai's chest a lot as well.....are all men like that?"(aya)

"....."

That's really difficult to answer. Not to mention, that the person herself seems to have heard the question since I felt that her horse slightly moved away a bit from us. Must be my imagination.

But really there is no way to answer this question. At least not for a 28yr old man to a 18yr old girl. Somehow I could only apologise to Souichi in my head. It seems Miss Francesca's affection points for him instantly dropped even though he wasn't even here.

As the horse swayed while running, Aya hugged me tightly from behind so as to not fall off. Right now she wasn't in her uniform but was in a light, scarlet robe with silver embroidery which could make one feel the sensation of her skin almost directly. Though her height has grown, she hasn't really grown. Obviously, I can't say that out loud. Well, I was also wearing a robe over my tunic so what I felt wasn't really that much.

These clothes of her were made out of holy silver thread taken from a special bug/crawler then had the protection of the Fire spirit Salamander applied on it turning it into a scarlet colour. Above that, the embroidery was made out of mithril as well. The robe she wore above it was also made out of the skin of a water dragon. On her waist was a mithril short sword with an emerald embedded at the end of the handle; and a magicians short rod with an almost transparent amethyst like gem embedded on top.

It's the same equipment as when she had fought against the Demon God. All of it were so valuable that they were essentially priceless. It could make one think that she was leaving to maybe start a war all on her own. Well, when you're on a journey, actually it might be better to be well equipped like her. You don't know what could happen after all so its better to be at top equipment always. I, who buys no new equipment due to lack of money is actually the one who does it wrong.

"But still, when we're on horses like this, you end up thinking back of times when we travelled together right?"(renji)

".....haah."(aya)

She gave a sigh seeing that I had dodged her question but she didn't pursue any further. Thank god for that.

"That's true. After Yui-chan contracted with that Dragon, we started to always use that dragon to travel."(aya)

Hiyuu Yui. One of the heroes known as the Monster User/Tamer. She was the youngest among us 13. I wonder how she's doing these days. All of the monsters she contracted were famous ones. A Fairy who was a master in spirit magic. A Ghost Knight that was immortal and a master swordsman. And an ancient dragon that called itself a king. I think they should be at the Elfreim continent right now. That place might be better to live in right now.

"Do you know what Yui's doing nowadays——?"(renji)

"I wonder. Maybe Yuuko-san knows about it."

Utano-san eh. I wonder what that person is doing right now as well. But considering it's her, she must have taken a lot of workload on herself and working hard right now, I guess. That's the kind of person she is. She can be scary at times too though.

"Renji, let's head straight towards the Forest of Rotting Souls."(elf)

"Sure! We'll go till the entrance and spend the night there. "

Making the horse run by our side, Feirona told us about our current destination. Forest of Rotting Souls. As it name suggests, it's a place where the dead walk and ghosts appear and the living rarely enter. The highway to the capital is made going around this forest but if we break through it directly, we'll be able to reduce a lot of time. Last night, me and Feirona decided to break through it while planning our routes to take.

Zombies are pretty tough but they have dull movement. Ghosts are harmless as long as you have a strong spirit/will. If we wanted to kill them we'd need silver-made equipment but if it was just to pass through, it was pretty easy.

Well, originally only me, Feirona and Mururu were going to be travelling but now that we have Aya and Miss Francesca with us as well, we could

kill them with magic too. Zombie's could be killed with physical weapons but ghosts were completely spirit types. Either magic or silver was compulsory. At first we could only ignore them and rush through the forest but now we would be pretty safe while going through it.

The only problem left is to make sure that we don't get lost. But with Feirona, the elf, with us, we should be fine with that as well.

[Journeying with Aya. How nostalgic.]

"Yes, that's true. I'll be in your care as well, Eru."(aya)

[Yeah, I leave Renji to you Aya.]

"…….why me?"

I could only sigh. It's true though so I couldn't really refute it either.

It's been one year since I travelled with Aya, with one of my comrades.

While running through the early morning, misty highway, I felt myself getting a bit excited. Aya must be the same as well. Thinking that, I became a bit happier.

Chapter 27 Road to the capital (4)

*

The view from the back of the horse felt nostalgic and it cheered me up. I felt it was unbecoming of my age.

Riding horses required stamina of a different kind than walking. What I want to say is, my whole body hurts.

"…… I'm tired."

[Again you're talking like that.]

I had heard Ermenhilde's fed up voice countless times already.

But I really am tired. Even though a year ago I used to work hard, fight during the day and be on guard duty during the night. I wonder is it the one-year blank or have I just got too old for this.

While thinking about that I threw wood into the fire in front of me.

"Shouldn't you sleep for a while?"

"Yeah. Switch with me later."

Feirona asked me that worriedly, but the order for night duty had already been decided. Well, I'll switch with him after a few hours I just work hard till then.

They must have been tired from the journey because Ms Francesca and Mururu at already gone to sleep on the soft grass. Since we did not prepare anything comfortable like a tent, they were sleeping with just a blanket covering the whole body.

Only me and Feirona and Aya one awake right now. We had surrounding the bonfire but there was barely any conversation. In the darkness of the night only the sound of the fire crackling could be heard.

"Then, I'll go to sleep first."

“Please do. I’ll wake you up when it’s time.”

“……Then, take your time.”

“—wha”

what the hell does he mean by that. Giving a scornful laugh I broke another piece of wood for the fire.

Giving me a suggestive look by, he also went to sleep. Only me and Aya remained. Also Ermenhilde.

“Is it fine not to go to sleep?”

“um……. Yes.”

I see. I threw more wood into the fire.

I did not say it out loud but I once again felt nostalgic.

During the journey to kill the Demon God we often spent time like this. I wonder how long has it been……

At first she was cautious of me and barely talked. After that incident with the Ogre, she began talking. I recall the reason but cannot remember exactly how long ago it was. Probably, Aya remembers though. Realising that I felt a bit apologetic.

“It feels nostalgic right?”

After a long silence, she spoke up.

“Yeah, that’s right. Back then we used to spend lot of time like this.”

“…… Yes.”

When I said she replied in a happy manner. Was she happy that I remembered it was it simply because she could start a conversation. It was probably the former.

Her face shining from the fire looked more mature than those times.

“Say, Aya.”

“What is it?”

“How is your life in the Academy? Is it fun?”

When I asked that she looked at me and started laughing. She was trying to restrain herself apparently it was too funny.

Did I ask something weird? I tilted my head in confusion.

“Renji-san asks questions like an actual father would.”

“…… Really?”

That was not really my intention. I could only scratch my head. That must have been funny as well because she started laughing again.

[Why not ask something more romantic instead?]

“Like what?”

What kind of question is that?

Thinking that——-

“Say, Aya.”

“fufu, what is it this time?”

“Hm…..”

I tried to think of a topic but nothing came to my mind. Questions regarding romance came to mind but if asked her “do you have a boyfriend?” I know exactly what would happen to me……

Yayoi-chan probably would not have gotten a boyfriend and Souichi had not gotten a girlfriend when I asked him the last time. That guy is awkward and sucks it lying so it’s probably true.

Somehow I feel that the difficulty of asking questions suddenly increased due to what Ermenhilde said to me.

“Mouu”

As I spent time just looking at her, Aya sighed somewhat fed up yet somewhat enjoying this. To be unable to even hold a proper conversation, I really am an useless adult.

As I dropped my shoulders, Aya threw more wood into the fire while showing a gentle smile.

While looking at her smile, I once again felt that she had become more mature. Back then she had a childish side to her and a cute one as well. Though sometimes she would surprise me by suddenly acting like an adult as well.

But her current smile held a womanly charm that could captivate anyone. Feeling a bit weird, I averted my gaze from her to the fire. What am I thinking of a child 10 years younger than me? I sighed again. I, myself, feel more childish than her. It was both pathetic and embarrassing.

"The Magic Academy, it's fun. I made a lot of friends and could also read lots of magic documents as well."

[Friends? If it's Aya, you must have a lot of many friends as well?]

Don't ask that. As usual, I could only hope that my partner would learn to read the mood.

I don't know how she took that question, but she was now looking shyly towards the fire. She really has grown a lot this past one year. I had never seen smile like this before.

For the time being, let's just hit Ermenhilde inside my pocket and hope it tries to read the mood more.

"Well, as long as you're having fun, it's fine. It's important for classmates to have fun with each other."

Once again I averted the topic. Though it must be like Ermenhilde had said. I am also a man after all, whether it be my comrade or someone younger than me, I end up seeing them in that way anyway. Right now, we were talking like it's normal but we had not been summoned, we would never had even made contact.

And now she even had the title of a hero. It's normal to have the attention of guys.

"..... Is that it?"

Apparently she was not happy with my words because she was now

pouting and I also felt that her gaze had become sharper as well. Pretending to have not noticed that I threw more wood into the fire.

[Seriously.]

“I just want Aya to simply enjoy a normal life as a student.”

Probably, Utano-san had the same reason to send these kids to the magic Academy. They were 15 years old. Normally one would spent time playing with their friends at this age.

“Renji-san always runs away like that.”

“I’m an adult after all.”

“It’s not fair.”

“Adults are never fair, Aya.”

When I shrugged my shoulders saying that, I only got a sigh in response. Ermenhilde was the same.

If I had to answer honestly, I’ll have to take a step forward. I’ll have no choice but to clearly understand what she expects from me.

And I don’t think even she wants that. As a result, even though she would show discontentment when I ‘run away’ like this, she never gets truly angry. I think she enjoys my playing with words.

We were silent for a while after that. Once again, only the sound of the crackling fire, the swaying of grass doing and sleeping sounds of Ms Francesca came to our ears.

“It really is nostalgic, right?”

“It truly is.”

I feel we’ve had this same kind of conversation a long time before.

I would be unfair and she would be direct and honest.

What is it that she expects from me I wonder.

During the journey, both Utano-san and Toudo would often scold me. But even so, we have yet to find the answer. And even if we did I wonder if

I could see that out loud.

[You 2 seriously..... Don't make any progress at all.]

"You just keep your mouth shut."

This bastard, I really will throw away.

"Eru has also changed."

[Hmm?]

"You have become more humanlike."

[..... I am a weapon though.]

I silently laughed at Aya's words. When I did, I could feel Ermenhilde's atmosphere become disappointed.

It can't be helped, after all, I see you as my partner and not just a weapon. That's why I felt happy when Aya said that. And it's amusing to see you get disappointed at that in such a human like way.

"So she says."

[Why do both of you don't treat me like a weapon..... No, all of you 13 summoned ones are like that.]

It even started grumbling like that.

That was even more amusing as me and Aya started laughing again. It's your fault for saying something so strange.

"You really should go to sleep now."

"I will go to sleep when it's your turn to sleep as well."

There's deep meaning behind what she said, but depending on how you look at it, one could really take it the wrong way.

"I hope you don't say that to someone else as well?"

"I don't. Only to you, Renji-san."

She started giggling. I thought of answering in an amusing way but gave up in the end simply scratched my head.

I wonder serious or just messing with me. Must be the latter. Cause that would be better for my heart.

“I see.”

“Yes.”

I could reply like that only and she as well replied with just one word.

I think that’s fine to be honest.

While we gazed at the bonfire in front of us, I gave a sigh. Even after one year we haven’t changed. I wonder if that’s good or bad. If I were to use Ermenhilde’s words, there is no progress.

When I was thinking like that, Aya silently stood up. And came and sat beside me just like that.

“You did this when we were travelling as well back then a lot.”

“.....Mouu.”

But I feel that the distance between us is shorter than what it was back then. Would this be called as progress I wonder.

[fumu.]

Also, it’s troublesome that I don’t have anyone to entrust Ermenhilde with like I had back then.

Normally I would leave it with Souichi or Utano-san. I should think about maybe giving it to Ms Francesca or Feirona the next time we camp. Well, it’s not like this party would continue for ever. I would probably not travel with Aya after this.

In the end after that we barely talked any more. The fact that I had stayed on night duty more than required and forgot to wake up Feirona till much later, I’ll just consider this that we were serious in our duty. I guess I must have been affected too much by my nostalgia.

The fact that the we have made no progress, means that our relationship has not changed in any year. That in turn means that my position inside Aya’s heart has not changed even though I had

disappeared so selfishly. I should be happy for that——- right?

After switching with Feirona, I positioned myself so. Giving a wry smile, I closed my eyes.

“Goodnight, Ermenhilde.”

[Yes. Sleep well, Renji.]

Tomorrow, we will be going through a forest filled with ghosts and undead. I won’t have the time to think of such useless things.

I hated that part of myself that ran away from my own thoughts.

Adults really are dirty. They only run away all the time.

Chapter 28 Forest of Rotting Souls (1)

*

As the horses galloped, we ran through the forest.

As the name of the forest would suggest, the earth and every tree was rotting and the undead and spirits would appear in this forest.

Just running through the rotten land would consume stamina and the miasma released by the rotting trees tried to decrease our sanity. Zombies would aim for living beings like us and try to make us also like them. Ghosts that had mist like bodies would decrease our mental resistance, and show us nightmares when we sleep. Countless corpses can be seen while crossing through this forest and the dark miasma released by the trees would not allow sunlight to enter the forest.

I feel that we should exit this forest as soon as possible but this forest was extremely dense. Even if we use horses to run through the shortest distance, it would still take at least five days.

“Feirona, can you keep on going a bit more?”

“Yeah, no problem. But before that——”

“I’ll take care of Ms Francesca and Mururu. You just focus on breaking through this forest.”

“Got it.”

I confirmed his condition by going a bit closer to him on my horse.

The one most affected by crossing this forest is Feirona. Without any protection of the spirits, the effect of the hatred from the dead and spirits on this elf was more than what I expected. Even he himself, who lived in the forest of magical energy, did not expect it to be so. He seems to be trying to hide it but the colour of his face seems really bad. He is it sick yet but one could tell from a single glance that his condition was growing

worse.

Even though I was supposed to know how troublesome evil spirits can be, I still didn't expect the effect to be this big. And it's not like this is the first time I'm travelling within an elf either. But the last time I did so it was through a forest that had immense protection from the spirits I think. I see, I think I once again understood why elves are called as the watchmen of the forests. His condition is not that bad yet but that doesn't mean it can't get worse. I must do something. I thought about it as I ran on my horse. The best thing to do at such times would be to take a rest but even that was difficult in this forest.

There was no paved roads in this forest. Even now, we are moving forward with the help of Feirona's foreseeing abilities as one of the inhabitants of forests. And it would be really bad if he became unable to move.

"It would be nice if we could at least sleep well during the night."

[That would be even more difficult in this forest though.]

I guess so. While the sun was up we would move towards the east where the capital is but at night we will get attacked by zombies and ghosts.

It's amazing that we can still move even after having not rested for three whole days. Since we let the females get sleep in priority, my and Feirona's fatigue had reached its peak.

I only have to fight with my sword so it's fine as long as I last while we move but our movement was dependent on Feirona's experience so at least I wanted him to get some rest.

"If only you could become a silver sword we would have less problems to deal with."

[Even I would be more relaxed if I could but unfortunately I am neither silver nor Mithril.]

Well, I wasn't expecting much anyway. Saying that inside my mind, I lined up alongside Ms Francesca's horse while running.

That Jade Green coloured sword was made of material that could not be found anywhere on this world. To be honest Ermenhilde was a sword made out of only magical energy. It even had the weird property to increase its sharpness, attack power and intensity only by releasing the seven constraints put upon me by the goddess. Just like silver is effective against the undead spirits, Ermenhilde's blade was one of the rare weapons that can wound a God.

Certainly, that was a very rare effect but it was useless in this current situation. It could work as a normal weapon against zombies but would have no effect on spirits and ghosts. As usual, I felt like crying from the uselessness of my cheat.

"Ms Francesca."

"What is it, Renji-sama?"

An energetic voice came to me as reply.

Because we let them rest at night, Ms Francesca and Mururu were still energetic. Currently Aya was resting behind me by closing her eyes. She is not asleep, but I still felt slightly embarrassed by seeing how much trust she put on me. Thinking that for a second, I realised that I was being imprudent and removed those thoughts by shaking my head.

"Mururu as well, tell me if you feel like you can't go on any longer. We will take a rest then."

"fufu, thanks for your consideration. But I'm still fine."

Saying that she gave up a soft smile which made me feel calm as well. But that was also only for a second. Her gaze suddenly became serious. It's same time Feirona running at the front also stopped his horse, and Aya was resting while leaning on back also stirred and prepared for battle.

When I finally looked towards the front, I saw armoured human zombies standing as if blocking our path. Well that probably is not their intention but they still were in the way. Looking closely I also saw 2 mist like things floating around them; must be ghosts.

They say you cannot see spirits but through their evil intentions and hatred the ghosts in this world held mist like bodies. Well, it made things easier for us though. The first time I saw them, rather than getting scared, I just felt 'this really is a fantasy world eh?', that's all.

Zombies didn't have clear thoughts or will. They didn't swarm like goblins and simply attacked the living due to pure instinct.

In contrast, ghosts would control zombies or other undead that had weak wills to attack the living. There were even more troublesome enemies like vampires and Grim Reapers that had the same abilities as well.

If there was a clergy with us we could purify them with the goddess's miracle but a clergy that could use such a high level miracle would not go on an adventure in the first place. He/She would remain in the church while praying to the goddess. I may be prejudiced on that though.

"Aya, I leave the ghosts to you. Ms Francesca go to Feirona's side."

Saying that I climbed down from my horse and at the same time Mururu came beside me. Normally we would ignore such enemies but seeing that Feirona stopped, that must be the path we have to go on. Concluding that, I decided to quickly take care of this.

"I'll take the right."

"Then, the left is mine."

At the same time I kicked the earth and ran. Her cloak flapped open and Mururu's both hands grew out knife-like claws and were wrapped in white fur. As she ran towards the zombies with physical speed incomparable to mine, she mowed down their rotting flesh with those claws. Unable to withstand the shock, zombies fell to the ground with their limbs blown off. Then she proceeded to kick away their heads as if it was daily work.

Zombies were really weird. They fall into confusion if their heads get blown off. But no matter how many times you pierce their heads with arrows, they were unaffected. Normally, one would focus on blowing away

their heads till nothing remained of it. A theory suggests that something —— like an evil spirit or bug has attached itself to the corpse and is controlling it but I'm not interested in checking that. Sounds disgusting. As long as I know how to kill it I don't care.

I also came close side-by-side to her and attacked the zombie's neck with my iron knife. The first swing cut through halfway and then completely severed it from the reverse slash. It would have been impossible if it was a living being but since their flesh as rotten and muscles have decayed, this much was enough.

[Or you could use me you know?]

"You want to cut through rotting flesh?"

[..... I am a weapon after all.]

You just hesitated, did you not?

Giving a wry smile, I face the remaining one. At that instant the two ghosts also burst up. Aya must have used her magic.

Inside the silent forest, and explosives sound resounded. Three times.

For some reason ghosts were weak to magic. Magical energy—-were they weak to magic as it was turning your mental will to offensive ability or was it due to some other reason? And it was not like anything would work. Only Fire and lightning type magic were effective.

It was pretty common in fantasy games but when you see that occurring in reality as well, you will become curious behind the reason.

Even while I thought of such things, I didn't stop my hands and severed the head of the final zombie. Since they have rotten flesh, it has very dull movements. Apparently, humans unconsciously restrain their own power to not destroy their own bodies but zombies don't have that either. But if their flesh has rotten to this extent, even that is useless. Their arms would fall of just if they try to grab me and their legs would get torn off just by running a bit.

Mururu was already heading towards Miss Francesca. As expected, she

didn't want to cut through rotting flesh with her prided claws it seems. I wonder what did it feel to cut with your own claws. When I asked, she said only word–Disgusting. Well, if she says that it means she still isn't used to using claws on living things.

After confirming that all of them were dead, I returned to my horse on which Aya was already sitting.

"That helped."

"You're welcome."

Taking her small hand, I once again climbed the horse.

Due to the loud explosion just now, the forest's silence felt even more eerie now.

"Then, let's hurry up and move further."

As if he was waiting for me, Feirona began to move with his horse again. I and Miss Francesca moved our horses to follow him as well.

By my expectations, we'll still take 2 more days. There's still a long way to go before we leave this forest. Thinking that, I naturally leaked a sigh.

"Are you alright?"

Aya asked me from behind as she put a bit more strength in her arms around my waist. It's nice to be this close to a girl but if I am allowed to say something unromantic, this makes riding the horse more difficult so please spare me from this.

She seemed to be saying something but it was drowned by the sound of horses running and the blowing wind. When I was about to ask her again, Feirona came near us on his horse.

"Did something happen?"(renji)

"There's something there––"

Saying that, he stopped his horse and climbed down.

Then, he kneeled to the ground and traced through the earth with his finger. On looking closely, I realized that it was actually footsteps. It's

amazing how he had noticed that.

Even I have learned how to walk through a forest somehow but I guess I'm still incomparable to an Elf, I guess. And to have noticed this from atop a horse, it can only be called as amazing.

I also climbed down and confirmed the footsteps. They were not normal footsteps. It was not the sole of shoe, but was slender long finger like. Like a leg's bone fingers.

"A skeleton?"

"Probably. And a giant one at that."

Going by the footsteps it must be at least three times bigger than me. It must be an Ogre class skeleton at least or maybe a chimera type skeleton. You can't guess exactly what type it is just from the footprints but it's certain that a much higher level of monster is there.

"Did something happen, Feirona-san, Renji-sama?"

"Yeah, a little. Mururu you smell something weird?"

"Nothing different. The whole forest has a rotting smell."

She grimaced as she answered that.

In such situations, the enhanced smelling ability of beast men come in handy here but this forest was an exception to that.

"Did a troublesome monster appear maybe?"(aya)

"It is a skeleton. Probably an Ogre or chimera type....."

"To speak in Souichi's words, a boss character?"

"That's a nostalgic word. But yeah, something like that."

Back then we always called monsters so. Remembering that I started feeling nostalgic again. At first we really treated this as a game after all. Different world. Fantasy world. We were excited from a world where swords and magic ruled. So excited that we had forgotten that swords take life and we were always near death's door.

At the same time, I also felt my nervousness fade a little as well.

After three years I felt that I really have changed. To kill and get killed. Even though I'm on an adventure unbelievable from the point of view of someone living in the modern world, here I am calming down from remembering my previous adventure. I realised that I had gotten too used to this world as well.

"Boss?"

"Meaning a strong one, something like the master of this forest. If we defeated our journey might become easier for the remaining time."

As expected, the others did know what a 'boss character' meant so I gave them a short explanation. Well it's not wrong.

"It will be easy as long as Aya blows it away."

[Why are you completely depending on others..... I'm here as well, you know?]

"Skeletons would be too tough for me."

Saying that I shrugged my shoulders on which Ermenhilde gave a sigh. It can't be helped after all; I gave an excuse. I could destroy it with an axe or hammer created by Ermenhilde but I'm not good in using either of those. Even spears are difficult to swing around.

Also, rather than going into close combat with a weapon you're not good with, it is much more effective and safe to simply blow the target away with long-range magic attacks.

It doesn't want to cut zombies and it can't cut ghosts. And the skeleton will be too much for me. I guess it must be worried that it hasn't been of much use during this whole journey till now.

Though in my opinion that's how journeys work, to have the right person at the right job. It's not necessary for me to be able to do everything. Feirona takes care of moving through the forest, Vanguard is left to Mururu and ghosts are taken care of by Aya and Ms Francesca. Since would have been bad if I did nothing, I'm just moving to make sure everybody else can make the best of their abilities. That's also an important job in a party.

“fufu, it’s fine. I have also become much stronger than what I was a year ago.”

Aya said that by puffing her chest proudly on top of the horse. How dependable.

Also, if you become too strong I really might start asking you to protect me so try not to become too strong, okay?

Even though she was already much stronger than me a year ago, just how much stronger has she gotten now? I think sooner or later she really might become strong enough to take down the Demon God alone in magic battle.

“That’s good to know.”(renji)

“we also have Renji-sama as well.”(fran)

[that’s true.]

“Unfortunately, I’ll just be in the way this time.”

[.....Oi.]

Bringing out the medal inside my pocket, I stroked it with my finger.

I have the will to fight but there’s no one here that needs to be protected by me. Aya, Feirona, and Mururu, all three are stronger than me. Even Ms Francesca has become a reliable adventurer now. She might not be stronger than me but she should be able to protect herself at least.

In such a case, only one of my covenants will be cleared. My will to fight. That is not much different from the fight against those goblins. In such a situation, it would be difficult for me to face a skeleton. Especially if it’s against an Ogre or chimera type.

To be unable to fight with a stable level of power is one of the biggest weaknesses of my cheat. There are times when three or four of my covenants are released against mere goblins or orcs yet there are times when only one of them is released against even boss class monsters.

I don’t even know how many times I have sighed at that fact. Today as well, I sighed once again. Aya looked at me probably having understood

my thoughts but I decided to ignore it.

"Well, let's quickly take care of this. After the sun sets, the enemy will have the advantage."

"That's true."

I agreed with Feirona's words. It would be troublesome to be ambushed in the darkness of the night.

Due to the different world compensation/cheat, Aya also has a stronger physical body than normal but as a magician she is much weaker than someone like Souichi.

It would be better if we went all out on attack and finish it quickly, just to be safe.

"For the time being, let's keep heading east. Going by the direction of the footsteps, that skeleton seems to be moving that way as well."

"Yes. Please tell me when you find it."

"Got it."

But, well, it would be better if we did not meet it at all, I think.

I want to avoid useless battles. No matter how strong Aya is, it's never certain how the battle proceed.

You might end up endangering not just yourself but you comrades as well due to some unexpected situation. The safest would be to escape this forest without ever meeting that skeleton.

"I really want to get out of this forest already."(Renji)

[....muu.]

"Why are you sulking?"

[During this journey, I have done absolutely nothing at all.....]

I don't really mind that though. In fact, this partner of mine should learn how to depend on its comrades more. Well, I feel that it will just get angry that I depend too much on mine.

“I don’t really mind either.”

Aya must have heard it’s voice as well since she was also consoling it. She really is cute in times like these. Maybe because she’s always scolding others most of the time, this has more impact.

“Depend on me a bit more, Eru.”(aya)

[but still...]

“It will make me happy though?”

I listened to their conversation as I controlled my horse so as to not fall back behind the others.

Depend on me, eh?

Well, unlike myself, she actually has the strength to backup those words so there shouldn’t be any problem. Without the strength I tried to be like that which is why I failed so many times. Just because I’m an adult doesn’t mean I could do everything. But well, because I worked hard like that, I was able to gain the trust of my comrades.

You really don’t know how your actions could lead to any result in this world.

[..... I know..]

The voice that answered Aya seemed somewhat proud.

[That’s why I want to be depended upon as well, by Renji.]

—— how should I answer to that?

How should I take those words? What is the true meaning behind Ermenhilde’s words? Thinking all that, I shook my head.

“I do depend on you, partner.”

[I want to be depended upon like a weapon, partner.]

That would be impossible.

After all you are my comrade that I trust the most.

Kakaka, when I laughed like that, Ms Francesca and Mururu turned to

look towards me. Since they cannot hear Ermenhilde's voice, they must have been surprised to see me laughing so suddenly.

This is also getting a bit troublesome as well. Maybe after some more time, I should let them hear Ermenhilde's voice as well. Well, it depends on my own convenience after all. It's only allowed to my closest comrades. It's normal to think like that right?

Chapter 29 Forest of Rotting Souls (2)

*

Evening, four days after entering the forest. While preparing for the camp, I looked towards the sky. Covered by mist like miasma, the setting sun could not be seen but some of its light was passing through.

I expect us to get out of this mist by tomorrow, but there's a high chance that zombies or ghosts will appear. I wonder if it's my imagination that those guys were appearing solely for the purpose of hindering our advance.

There were a lot of uncertainties like Feirona's health and the yet to be seen giant skeleton. I might be getting a bit impatient to get out of this as fast as possible but it would be suicide to travel on horses at night. Even with the elf to guide us, we will still get ambushed.

And even if I don't hurry we will get out of this mist tomorrow for sure. I can still endure for a few more days. Well, it's usually at such moments that something unexpected is bound to happen though. Going by my experiences in this world, tomorrow will definitely be a rough day for us.

While thinking such, I once again sighed at the fact that the medal inside my pocket was still silent.

[.....]

"are you still sulking?"

[I'm not sulking. I was just thinking about something.]

"Oh?"

At such a white lie, for a second I hesitated how to answer, but then decided to let it go.

Though it might not accept it, it is definitely sulking that I don't use it as a weapon. It can be so cute at times. As I gave a slight smile,

Ermenhilde sighed disappointedly. Deciding to ignore that, I focused on gathering dry branches for the fire.

“Mururu, how much have you gathered?”

“Only a little.”

As I look towards her who was doing the same thing as me, she had only gathered sticks enough which could be held in one hand.

Maybe due to the dense mist, it couldn’t be helped that most of the dead branches were moist. We were still a bit short. Even after including the ones I gathered, we will still need a bit more. She understands that as well it seems as she went back to looking for dry branches after answering me. She will not say it out loud, but she must be fatigued as well. In a rotting forest like this one, even a beast woman’s senses would go out of order, which is why she must be irritated. Though a human like me wouldn’t understand that.

“I’ll gather the rest so you can go take a rest if you want.”

“I’m fine. This is my job.”

“I see.”

One thing I understood during the journey was that this girl had a strong sense of responsibility and duty. That should be obvious from the fact that she accepted the spirit gods request alone and came to this city by herself.

But because of her absent-minded or rather careless attitude, I ended up getting an impression that she was an airheaded girl.

She’s the type that will finish what she started. Even now, she’s working hard even though she’s tired. It’s pretty amazing for kid, I really think that. Well it’s pretty normal for an adventure though.

But exactly because she treats this ‘ normal quality’ of hers as obvious, it is valuable.

“I wonder what Ms Francesca is making for dinner?”(renji)

“….. As long as I can eat it anything works.”

“haha—-that’s true.”

Though that might sound rude, I ended up agreeing with her.

During our previous journey, I was the one in charge of the. That was because I thought that Ms Francesca, as a noble, wouldn’t know how to cook.

That might have been a one-sided prejudice from my side but it was correct. Yesterday’s meal was prepared by her alongside Aya but……. Well, you can guess the result.

It was a dish that needed actual courage to eat it.

Aya seemed to have practised a lot in this one year. Making an ordinary dish, she came to me with such a triumphant look that I couldn’t decide how to prevent. It was level apart from an year ago. Though I got scolded even when I complimented her for some reason. As expected, it was probably because I ended up telling the others how bad she was back then.

“Well, that’s fun in its own way.”(renji)

“Violence towards ingredients is unforgivable.”

[……. You’d go that far, eh?]

Seriously, I gave a wry smile inside my mind.

Apparently this girl was not just a glutton, she actually had deep feelings for food.

It’s not really bad—— but not something to be complimented for either. Seeing that the reason for such a comment from was our own comrade, I couldn’t decide how to respond to that.

I lose no matter which side I take. Well, I guess I can only wish that Ms Francesca’s cooking skill improved quickly as days pass. Since she likes studying, I think she’ll get better soon enough.

That said, most of our meals during journey will involve just dried meat and crackers. I doubt it is easy to cook different things out of that. Though Me, Feirona or Mururu can arrange for meat by catching wild

animals as well. They taste good just by roasting them. It will be great we could make a stew by using that and wild grass.

I started feeling more hungry just by thinking of that. As I rubbed my belly, small rumbling sound came.

“Renji can you.....”

“Hmm?”

A bit after collecting branches in silence, Mururu spoke up surprisingly.

When I looked towards her to answer, she had accumulated lots of branches in both her hands. Whether it be her or Feirona, I really am no match for them in preparing for camping.

“What is it?”(renji)

“can you cook?”

I looked at her with a blank face due to the sudden question. No well, I guess it’s not sudden considering we were talking about food I guess.

“I’m pretty normal I guess. I can make things eatable at least.”

Well, I don’t think I’m bad at it..... I have made a lot of stuff and have never received complaints from Souichi or the others.

“Really?”

“Men are pretty much at that level normally. Though Feirona..... Seems like he’d be great at it.”

[That’s true. That elf does look like he’d be good.]

Going by his atmosphere he gives of a feeling that he really can do anything. Is that just because he’s handsome?

After all, the scene of him cooking feels like it could become a painting or something. In that sense, does that make Ms Francesca hopeless beauty?

..... This might sound weird considering I was the one who thought of all this, but that really was a harsh evaluation. I definitely cannot say that in front of Ms Francesca. The first place, she is a noble lady, she

probably has never cooked in her life before. I guess it's amazing that she still could produce something that could actually be eaten. Her future is something to look forward to, yup.

"What about you? Have you ever cooked before?"(renji)

"Does roasting meat count?"

What the hell. This is the first time someone actually said that..... well not really.

In the past, both Aya and Utano-san were the same as well, I remembered. It is truly a misconception that all women can cook. That's the biggest fantasy here. Well, it makes sense though. You can't expect someone who has never cooked before to suddenly make something good.

"Next time, maybe you should learn something from Aya or Feirona?"

"I prefer to just eat."

Instant reply. Unable to answer her back, I could only avert my gaze and continue gathering branches.

It truly is very Mururu-like to say something like that. I'm really worried for this girl's future.

"Say, Mururu."

"What?"

"What are you planning on doing after completing your requested at the capital?"

"Return back to my forest..... I think."

"I see."

"I'm not sure. I want to try other food ——"

The moment she had said till that, she threw all the branches in her hands to the ground and quickly crept close to me.

Her white cloak got soiled but she didn't seem to mind that and glared towards the place she was standing before. At that the abnormal presence, I also threw away my branches and drew my iron knife.

“What happened!?”

“There’s something there!!”

Next instant, Mururu slashed the empty space with her claws. With a heavy clanking sound, sparks flew all over the place.

[An enemy!?!]

“I don’t know!!”

Depending on just the slight sound of wind cutting, I also jumped backwards. When I did so, the place I was standing before burst up.

“Magic!?”

As dust clouds rose up, the invisible assailant’s weapon became slightly visible. It can hide itself in magic but not its presence or sound. While keeping on guard for another sound of wind cutting I looked at the place where the mist like miasma was slightly wavering. Probably that’s where the main body of the enemy is. It’s clearly very far away. It could be using something like tentacles to attack as well. It is an attack from out of our reach. It’s clever..... I could conclude that it was not at the same level of ghosts or zombies. And if it can even use magic, it must be a very troublesome monster. But are there really monsters of that level in this forest? Before I could answer myself, once again the sound of wind cutting came. A cold sweat ran down my spine.

Enemies location is not certain, neither is its aim. Panicking at something I couldn’t see I ended up getting a bit late deciding whether I should block or dodge.

“Kuh!?”

[Renji, fallback for now!]

I somehow took that attack with my iron knife but my left hand went numb and I dropped it.

I somehow restrain myself from screaming which I was about to leak due to the insanely heavy attack. Unable to object at Ermenhilde’s advice, I did as it told and took some distance and took cover behind a big tree.

On the other hand, Mururu was cutting apart through the invisible enemy's attack without leaving any opening.

Must be due to her wild instincts, or maybe she was detecting the attacks from the swaying of the dislike miasma. In any case, her skill was incredible.

"Aya! Feirona!!"

Without any sense of shame, I called for my comrades with a loud shout.

I bit my lips. Was this monster waiting for us separate? For such a highly intelligent monster to have moved, it must be confident that it could at least take both me and Mururu together.

Instincts like that come to monsters or beast men much easier than to humans like us. That was irritating in itself. I was about to call Mururu but hesitated. Until the others come I have no other choice but to have her face this monster with all her strength. I don't want to break the concentration unnecessarily.

"Ermenhilde."

[I know.]

With those words, a silver long sword appeared in my hands.

Among the seven jade green gems embedded in its handle, two were shining. I don't know which of the two conditions had been fulfilled but two alone won't create a very strong weapon. I clicked my tongue in irritation but that won't change the situation. The weapon to protect me has simply changed from an iron knife to a long sword, that's all. I once again confirmed the swaying in the mist. From what seems to be the origin of the swaying, a tentacle like, whiplike something was attacking Mururu. It's movements were incredibly fast. It was impossible for me to follow it with just two of my covenants released. I could only confirm that the mist was swaying.

If it goes on like this, she'll be in danger. No matter how strong she is, I don't know how long can she fight against an invisible enemy. She is

more suited to a fast paced attacking battle. To stand in one place and take on enemy attacks is not how she fights. She probably is not moving because she would lose the movements of the opponent. If you cannot see the opponent it is better to stand your ground and focus on defence, she must have thought that way.

Should I wait for the others or should I move? Opening and clenching my left hand, I tried to get rid of the numbness.

"We are going to rush it."

[Got it.]

Saying that, I jumped out from the cover of the big tree and rushed towards what I thought of as the origin of the swaying in the shortest distance. Due to my movements which came exactly when it's attack had been deflected by Mururu, the enemy's movement stopped for a second. It must have hesitated in deciding which one to attack first between the two.

But that hesitation only lasted a second. His aim was me. Confirming the swaying of the mist, I predicting the place and timing where the attack would come. Silver sword in my hand creaked from the impact, and my body felt like it had gone completely numb for a second. Just how strong is this monster. I screamed inside my head.

But the very next instant, this time Mururu rushed towards it. Unlike me, she closed in incredible speed and slashed with her beautiful sharp claws. The sound of something hard breaking resounded throughout the forest. But—— there was no blood.

Confirming that, both of us took some distance from the monster. The space swayed and twisted and the outlines of the monster became more and more visible. It's as must have been voided due to Mururu's attack.

The first thing I saw was that it was white. It was not a pure, beautiful white like Mururu's, it was more dull, impure—— it was bones. It's size was equal an adult elephant. Inside four legs, like a spider but body was long and slim like a centipede. It's head was like an Orc with one horn. And above all that, the most conspicuous thing was the speed at which it

moved in scale; so fast that it left after-images—-

“Mu—”

My body moved faster than I could warn her.

I blocked the attack, which could even be followed, by pure intuition. The sword I was holding was blown off and my body flew unable to withstand the attack.

Next moment, my body hit the ground and I rolled and then hit the trunk of a tree as a final blow. All of the air was knocked out of my body and my vision blurred due to lack of oxygen. My body limped to the ground powerless but that lasted for only a second. Forcing my body to move again, I stood up while taking support of the tree I hit just now. It might be easier if I just fell asleep right there but I know that if I did, I won’t wake up ever again.

[Renji! Renji!!]

“I can hear you. Don’t shout in my ears.....”

The next moment, a familiar feeling entered my hands. Grabbing it with my both hands, I took the Seigan stance which is often seen in Kendo. (T/N: google seigan to see what it looks like.)

My body stiffened as I heard the sound of its foot moving. Next time, I’ll cut off its damn tail with a counter. Practically speaking, it’s really difficult but I still held the sword with full confidence.

But, no attack came towards me again. Only my own rough breathing resounded in my ears.

How long did I simply stand like that I wonder. Finally, something touched my swordtip. The next moment, I swung my sword overhead and ——

“It’s fine now.”

At that voice, my tension depleted. It was a voice I had become used to listening.

“—-Mururu?”

“Un.”

“Haaaah……”

That calm voice was definitely hers, and it proved that the battle was over. Realizing that what had touched the sword just now was her finger tip, all tension left my body.

And just like that, I fell back to the ground and took a deepe, deep sigh.

“What happened to that monster?”

“It ran away.”

“……Really?”

“Un.”

Even though it was a great chance to finish me off. Perhaps it plans to make sure to kill me easily after I have weakened?

That must be the case. I started feeling a bit depressed. Considering that it knew exactly when to fall back, it must be really used to hunting. Or contrary to its appearance, it’s actually a coward. In either case, it doesn’t change the fact that its very difficult to fight against. Almost invisible, and insanely strong as well. This is cheating really! I cursed in my head.

Suddenly I felt a pain from my right hand. On looking, I had a big, deep cut running from shoulder to the elbow. Taking on that kind of attack, I’m actually lucky that this much is all I had to bear. In the worst case, my whole arm could have been ripped off.

I feel exhausted just to have survived this but I really have to stop this from bleeding too much as well.

“Are you okay?”(mururu)

While looking at my arm, she asked worriedly.

Feeling a bit happy at that, my cheeks slackened involuntarily. Though I got hurt, it’s great that we both survived this ordeal. I felt a bit better thinking like that.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

But we can’t stay here like this. Seeing that the others didn’t come here even after all this time means that something must have happened on that side as well.

As I stood up with the support of the tree again, I started walking towards what I felt was the direction the camp was in.....and then soon stopped again.

“Which way is the camp?”(mururu)

“.....I’m sorry.”

Due to this battle, I’ve completely lost our bearings. Even the tree I had marked as a landmark had been destroyed due to fight. I can’t even tell which way is west and which is east.

Mururu is the same as me so she is also just standing by me.

“Oi, Feirona!!”

I shouted in a loud voice but there was no answer.

I’m certain now that something must have happened there as well. It’s not like we went very far to gather the branches anyway. They should have noticed if such a big battle happened.

The only conclusion I can get to is that they must have been attacked as well. But I doubt there would be a more than one monster of that class so nearby each other.....or rather, I don’t want to think like that. Let’s try and not imagine the worst scenario directly. If I didn’t do so, we’ll just end up standing here all day.

As time passed, I thought of what to do next. It’d be too dangerous to just recklessly start running around to look for the camp as well. We’ll definitely get lost. But, it’ll be dark very soon. Then it’ll be time for ghosts to rampage. Before that, I really want to meet up back with the others.

“Mururu, can you smell where that monster or Aya is?”

I asked that but she shook her head. I feel that her wolf ears drooped a bit as well.

“Is something the matter?”(renji)

“Hm?”

“You seem very less energetic than usual.”

At the same time, I confirmed my wound as well. The cut is pretty deep but it’s not gotten to the bones. The blood vessel seem fine as well so the bleed wasn’t as profuse I had expected. A small piece of luck in misfortune, eh? It hurts so much I could cry but I won’t die at least.

I took help from mururu to rip of my left sleeve and used it to tie my right arm tightly to my side to stop the blood loss. This should hold it back a little. As the pain lessened my thoughts became more arranged as well.

“Cheer up Mururu, we’ll soon meet up with Ms Francesca and others.”

“Un. But will they be okay?”

“Yeah, they’ll be fine. Those guys won’t make a blunder like me after all.”

With those 2 there, they should be able to deal with it while protecting Ms Francesca as well.

I am a bit worried but Aya’s there as well. Let’s believe that they’ll be fine. Right our situation is the bigger problem. We’re lost and have no items either. And one’s injured as well. Let alone being a burden, with this kind of wound, normally you’d just abandon me. Well, I doubt Mururu’s actually that cold of a person to do that though.

“With this place as the centre, let’s look around a bit. We shouldn’t be very far away from the camp.”

“Un. We, need to treat your wound as well.”

“There’s that as well but I’m more worried about those guys.”

We are both frontline fighters. Those three are all rear line fighters. This isn’t just at the level of being a called a bad party balance. We have to really meet up fast since I’ll be the next one to get targeted definitely. I have been weakened and there’s really no condition for much of my

covenants to get released so I can't even fight properly.

While thinking of that, I realized that Ermenhilde hadn't said anything for quite a while now.

"Oi, what happened?"

I struck my pocket with my working left hand.

[.....I'm sorry.]

For some reason, I was apologised to with a heavy sounding voice.

I ended up tilting my head in confusion. Did something strange happen I wonder? I thought but couldn't come up with anything. Is it just worried about the attack from that monster? But that had nothing to do with Ermenhilde though?

"Hm?"

[Even though I kept saying things like I want to be of use to you, this is the end result.]

"No, this isn't really your fault you know?"

I was the one who was just weak.

In fact, it's a miracle that we survived after facing something like that. Neither Mururu nor Ermenhilde did anything to get blamed for.

"Don't worry about it partner. We'll win next time."

[.....Yeah.]

It's still depressed. Now how should I cheer up this partner of mine who gets depressed at the weirdest of things? While I was thinking that, I felt my mantle being pulled slightly.

On looking, Mururu was looking up towards me with upturned eyes. Shit, she's really cute.

"What is it?"(renji)

"Who are you talking to?"

Ah.

“Now that I think about it, I haven’t let you hear it, c’mon Ermenhilde, greet her.”

[What’s up with that——-no, well, never mind, I guess it’s fine.”

Normally it’d snap at me but I guess she took more mental damage than I thought.

In my opinion, it’s fine as long as I live though. As usual, its really hardheaded.

On looking at the ground, the iron knife I was using before came to my view. It had completely broken. I picked its handle but its pretty much unusable now. I just put the handle back in the sheath. Guess I’ll have to depend on Ermenhilde completely from now on.

[Hm Hm, can you hear me Beastwoman?]

“!?!”

Her small shoulders jumped up in surprise. It looks like she can hear Ermenhilde.

“My name is Ermenhilde. The sword of the Hero and the GodSlaying weapon granted unto Yamada Renji by the Goddess Astrarea.]

“What kind of intro is that. I’m not suitable as a hero.”

How many times do I have to say that, this idiot.

I ended up sighing.

“un, nice to meet you.”(mururu)

But, Mururu’s reaction was simpler than expected. She must have heard about me from either Aya or Ms Francesca already I guess. She must have been explained that back when a great hero like Aya took on this request.

[Mu……]

But apparently, Ermenhilde would have preferred if she was a bit more surprised I guess since she doesn’t seem to accept her reaction.

She was surprised when you spoke up first so it’s fine right? Be satisfied with just that.

“With the introductions now complete, let’s join up with Aya and the others as quickly as possible.”

If this goes on, if we get attacked again, Mururu may be fine but I’ll be dead.

Saying that, I began walking while looking for trees that could act as a landmark. I guess it’s a small blessing that terrain became easier to recognise due to the battle. I decided to look around the area with this place as the centre.

I hope we can join up with the others before the sun sets.

Just when I was being optimistic thinking that we could leave this forest by tomorrow, this happens. It’s really heart-breaking but I can’t really give up either.

There’s someone here who’s more than 10 years younger than me. I can’t be the one who gives up before her. Let’s do our best and keep walking. I’ll take this girl to the capital safely. Definitely.

Chapter 30 Forest of Rotting Souls (3)

*

So as to speak simply, in the end we never found Feirona and the others.

We did reach the camp but all we found was a big hole there. Considering that Aya and the others were not there, it must be a trap laid by monsters. There are monsters who can use magic as well after all. So there's a chance they can also create pitfalls like Aya and Ms Francesca.

Seeing that I got no reply even after shouting their names there, they must be at the bottom of the hole..... Seriously what's going on? I didn't make a mistake anywhere right?

I cant even jumped down the whole without knowing anything about its death or what would I find at the bottom. Mururu wanted to jump in but I stopped her by calming her down. There are magic which allows flight as well. For someone at Aya's level would be easy to save both of the others from that. But then, just why are those guys still inside that hole. It could be that they had already come out of that hole and were now looking for us. In any case, with so little information I can't decide how to move next.

I did think of simply waiting by the edge of the hole but even that was difficult. Hiding inside the hollow of a big tree, I questioned and thought with Mururu about what we should do next.

Whether it be wait for others here or go out to look for them, it won't be easy. Right now and incomparable amount of zombies are roaming around. This must be the work of that skeleton and not the usual ghosts. It must be controlling the zombies. In such a situation, rather than looking for my own comrades, I feel like I'll end up becoming a comrade of those zombies instead.

"What should we do?"(mururu)

"what indeed.."

Though the hollow of the tree was big it still didn't mean that it had enough space to easily fit to people. I was stuck really close to her and every time she moved the sensation I felt would start making me feel itchy. Definitely not harbouring some wicked thoughts but, I still feel somewhat guilty for some reason.

Unlike the hollow of the tree, it seems my mind sure has a lot of free space to think about such things. I really feel speechless.

We still haven't met up with the others but I guess I'm still calm because I trust that they'll be fine. An invisible enemy is certainly a threat but Aya isn't the type of fall behind. After all, we're talking about the genius magician. She would be able to easily protect both Ms Francesca and Feirona.—- I have to trust her like that and believe that, otherwise I won't be able to move forward. At that, Mururu looked at me with a complaining gaze.

"Are you not worried?"

"It's because I trust them. I am worried about Ms Francesca but those two are also there so it should be fine."

I'm such a liar. I'm definitely worried. But I do trust them as well..... Human emotions are such a difficult thing. And if I started worrying about who would calm Mururu?

And before that there's a bigger problem here.

Though I'm trying to be not very conscious of it, my right hand hurts. I tell without even touching that I have a fever. Have my wounds festered was that attack poisoned as well? I hope it's the former at least.

After getting wounded, though not much, I did bleed. But if I was losing energy to poison it will cause serious setbacks. I'm not the only one who'll be in danger, Mururu travelling with me would also end up in danger. In the worst-case, if I become unable to move, there would be no one to protect her.

So as to not waste my energy, I tried to spend time moving as less as possible. The air inside the hollow of the tree was caught but Mururu

within my arms was warm. And my right arm was even hotter. It feels as if a red hot rod has been inserted into my arm.

[I'm not sure but Aya and the others are probably at the bottom of that hole.]

After a while, suddenly Ermenhilde spoke up.

Only I can hear it's voice. It's convenient that neither that zombies or that skeleton can hear it.

"..... Why?"

[If they were above there's no way Aya and that elf would have not heard the sound of our battle.]

When Mururu are still small voice, Ermenhilde explain so.

I have the same opinion. That's the only possible conclusion I can get to seeing that Aya and the others did take any action even after all this time. But in that case, why are they not coming back up. Is there something down there? Or are they getting attacked there? In any case, we have been completely split.

"The problem is how should we meet up back with them?"(Renji)

"just go down the hole?"

"Without any means to climb back up its as good as us getting lost. I can't really recommend it."

But, what if they were in some kind of trouble down there?

Such a thought came to me but I quickly shook my head. Even then, there is only little we can do. Rather than that we first need to deal with that shitty skeleton—- that boss monster controling zombies.

At least then the biggest threat will be gone, and if luck is ours, the zombies would go silent as well.

"Whether we go to save them or we just wait here, first we have to take care of that skeleton."(Renji)

[that's true. Right now only this beast woman can sense that thing we

can still be ambushed.]

“..... Mururu.”(Mururu)

Suddenly, she spoke up in a small voice.

When I looked at her wondering what was the problem, her gaze was a bit angrier than her usual blank one.

“It’s not beast woman. It’s Mururu.”

Oh, so she didn’t like how Ermenhilde called her.

[Hmph, for the likes of you, beast woman is more than enough.]

“Mu.....”

“This one is very stubborn in the weirdest of things. If you want to be caught by your name, you just have to work hard and get acknowledged by it.”(Renji)

I could simply tell Ermenhilde to say it, but that won’t be interesting after all. Also you’ll have a lot to think about when she actually gets acknowledged by Ermenhilde and gets called by her name.

Well, I would be lying if I were to say that it wasn’t problematic. But, Mururu is also the type who hates losing, or rather, tries to act strong so she wouldn’t stop once she’s set on something. Though it may be for a simple reason like getting herself called by her name by Ermenhilde, I’m happy that she can still act normal even in such a situation. Losing to fear and going berserk is a very easy to understand death flag.

“Now then, that’s enough for improving our friendship. Mururu, to have any confidence of winning against that skeleton?”(Renji)

“it will be difficult.”

“I see.”

Her answer was simple one. That’s a good thing on its own but is not a happy thing to hear right now.

Of course, it’s impossible for me as well. If I wasn’t perfect condition with my right hand, I still wouldn’t have any chance of winning. It seems

Ermenhilde also understood that seeing it spoke nothing. Well, to be honest, I simply don't want to fight it. But if I did so we will remain in a deadlock. If we are to simply wait for the others, I can only see that skeleton attacking us just when we try to meet up. I think it has that level of intelligence at least.

We have no choice but to defeat that skeleton. For both, leaving this forest and to be the meet up with the others.

"But, we're not going to stay here doing nothing right?"(Renji)

"yes. I will destroy that bone monster."

"Good decision."

That monster is definitely not invincible. Recalling the previous fight, I sorted out various information about it.

As long as we can take out its tail, Mururu should be able to deal with the rest, right?

Then first I must think of a way to destroy it's tail. It specialises in ambushing its prey, I doubt it has experience of being ambushed many times. I might be being a bit too optimistic, but it's a gamble worth taking.

But even before that, we have to think of a way to get near that invisible monster without getting noticed.

My head hurts. My wounded right arm hurts. And it wasn't just slowed dull kind of pain, it's the sharp kind, as if someone was putting a sharp needle inside my wound. This is really might be dangerous. Until we meet up with the others, I really don't want to see and deal with this wound. If I did I will definitely become unable to move. After all I'm scared of fighting and hate pain. If I were to look at my own festered wound, my heart would definitely break. I'm a coward after all.

"Got any plan?"(Renji)

"no, you?"

"I'll be bait and lure that skeleton out. Mururu, you use that chance to

ambush it and destroy it's tail from its core."

[..... You call that a plan?]

"It is one, right?"

Or do you have a better plan? I asked it that but got no reply.

In truth, there are very few ways in which we can take action. This is a party of a beast woman who cant use her senses properly due to the miasma of forest, and a wounded guy who cant even use his cheat properly.

"You're really kind, Ermenhilde."

"You're just an idiot, Renji."

I have already decided to gamble on this. To win, and to survive and meet our comrades. Both Ermenhilde and Mururu have already understood that as well. We aren't really connected neither do we have any strong bonds. We don't have any great memories with each other either. But still, the warmth this girl in my arms was precious.

Death is cold. That's why, I think, living beings search for warmth. I have seen lots of my friends die. Even though they were right beside me, the next moment, they were already dead. Countless times, way too many times, I have seen death. I have felt it.

"Renji, are you scared of dying?"(Mururu)

"yes, I am."

[.....Oi.]

On Mururu's sudden question, when I answered unhesitatingly, Ermenhilde gave an objecting voice.

It can't be helped. Everyone is scared of dying. After all, everything is over when you are dead. Maybe having felt my emotions, Mururu released all stiffness in her body and completely leaned on me. I was surprised for a second, but soon accepted that. This girl, is the same as me. Afraid of fighting, scared of getting hurt. Fearing death—— and doesn't want her comrades to die. The matter how confident of strong she is, she still is a

child in her teens.

What do we call this again? Thinking for a moment, I quickly recalled.

The suspension bridge effect. Though it is not love, I am the only one by her side right now. She simply wants warmth. I was the same, so I put more strength in my arms around her.

My right arm pained but it was proof that I was still alive.

“I am the same.”(Mururu)

“It’s normal. After all, when you die you can neither meet nor talk to anyone else any more.”

No matter what.

Corpses do not talk. They won’t hold your arm when you hold theirs.

There is no warmth. Only coldness.

And above all——— those left behind only have sadness. So much, that you feel like crying till there are no tears left. So much, that rather than experiencing that sadness again, it would be better to just die yourself.

That’s why neither will I die nor will I let anyone else.

If you live, you have to live for the sake of those who died as well. Facing pain that would make you feel like dying, you have to overcome it.

I don’t want to wear such feelings, neither do I want Mururu to do so either. Same for Aya and the others as well. That’s why I will live. I will put my life on a gamble and win it.

[Seriously..... Even though you’re about to go and fight, is this fine?]

“It is, Ermenhilde. We live exactly because we are afraid of dying. And we will kill that monster because we want to live. Easy to understand, right?”

[Certainly it is——haah.]

Hearing that sigh, I felt surprisingly calmer.

It’s the same as always. I would create trouble for Ermenhilde, and it

sigh as if fed up of me.

It might be a pain for Ermenhilde but it feels really nice to me it, calms me down, these everyday exchanges.

“It will be fine.”

Mururu muttered.

“I’ll protect Renji.”

[.....Ha. Isn’t it the other way round? Even though he’s like this, Renji is the type of man who does things when it truly matters.]

First, I got surprised by Mururu’s words, then dropped my shoulders at Ermenhilde’s.

What do you mean ‘even though he’s like this’ huh? Well, I mean, I do get scolded a lot for not taking things seriously, I want to refute that. But when you say that directly to my face, well, yeah..

Rather than that, I want to think of more practical things right now. Even though I said I’ll be the bait, there is no way that shitty skeleton will fall for a easy to understand trick. If only I had something to lure it.

My arm hurts. My head is not working. But I still must think of something. Also, rather than drowning in pessimism, is nice to see that everyone is still energetic.

“I’m the stronger one.”

[.....Oi, so she says Renji. Say something back.]

“Can’t refute that.”

[You’re supposed to!!]

But it’s true, I am no match for Mururu with only two of my conditions of my covenants cleared.

At that, I reached at the question, why even two of the covenants had been cleared.

One is my fighting will. it’s the usual one. But then what is the other one?

I have not made any promises with Mururu nor am I strong enough to protect her. In fact, I am the one being actually protected .

Death of my comrades. That is not cleared until I accept it myself. I don't think Aya and the others have died. The remaining two should be impossible to be cleared in this situation. One of them needs me to talk with the goddess directly and the other—— will never be cleared ever again. No matter what.

Then—

"That thing is a descendant of the Demon God.....?"

[What?]

"Our covenants. Back then when we were fighting, two of them had been released."

[Yes, that's right. But weren't those your fighting will and to protect this beast woman?]

"I was the one getting protected you know?"

[.....as usual, you self-depreciate too much.]

Even if you say that, it was a fact. In that fight, I had been unable to do anything.

"Covenants?"(mururu)

"It's a secret between me and Ermenhilde. There are various problems due to which I cannot fight at full strength."

"Even though you might die yourself?"

"Yes, even if I might die."

This is really such a sad tale. To be unable to fight at full strength even when I myself am so close to dying. She really is an ill-natured Goddess, seriously. I think so from the bottom of my heart.

".....You're weird."

Saying that, Mururu trembled with slight laughter while in my embrace.

“What happened?”

“What can we do to so you can fight at full strength?”

Even if you ask that, I had no way of answering this girl’s question.

If I cannot use my full strength, that meant that not just me, even Mururu will be in danger. But, I just can’t use it. I’ll need some reason to protect her……or maybe, I’ll have to sacrifice Mururu, who I am supposed to protect, just to use my strength. That’s the limitations I have. That’s why its meaningless.

I don’t want anyone to die. I don’t want to abandon them, I don’t want to let go of the bonds I have. I don’t want to lose the warmth of the girl inside my arms. Really––the cheat I wished for is a warped and twisted. To protect someone, I first have to sacrifice someone else. And even then, I won’t become the strongest. To do that, to become a true GodSlayer, I’ll end up sacrificing someone most dear to me.

“Then promise me.”(Renji)

“Promise?”

“That you won’t die no matter what. That’ll you live. No matter what happens, you won’t give up.”

Let’s end this once and for all.

We will meet up with Aya and the others and then finally get out of this shitty forest as well.

The Sun has yet to fully set but that will also end soon. The night isn’t far away. It will soon be the time for the undead to roam freely.

“If you can promise me that, I will definitely take you to the capital along with everyone else.”(Renji)

There was someone who embraced me like this when I was fearing death.

Afraid, shivering uncontrollably, crying, unable to move–– yet that person embraced me and gave me warmth. That person stayed by me all the time and kept on talking to me. I wonder, if that person also felt like

this back then.

'I want to protect this life that I hold within my arms.' I wonder if that person also thought like that.....

I cannot meet that person right now, but maybe someday——-

"I promise you. I will definitely take all of you safely to the capital. I won't let you die."

Yes, that's why I cannot die here. I have overcome danger of this level countless times already. Compared to the Demon God or the Demon King, that thing is nothing more than a clump of bones.

I made a promise——" I will show you the world." Let alone half, I haven't even shown one fourth of it right now.

"Alright, I promise."(Mururu)

"good, then I promise as well."

I swore.

The promise same as back then, the oath I took, without saying it out loud, I carved it inside my mind.

—- This time definitely, I will protect. I am not a hero protagonist, I am a god slayer.

If the enemy is a descendant of the Demon God, I can fight. I can kill it. I exist for that reason, and Ermenhilde is the weapon to fulfil that reason.

After killing the Demon God, and exterminating his descendants——- I searched for a way to live other than as a weapon for Ermenhilde. So that I can live with the God slaying weapon even in this world where a God slaying weapon was not needed any more.

For this selfish wish of mine that even the goddess could not fulfil, I cannot die here.

"I will not die."(Mururu)

"I will definitely not let you die. We'll all live and go to the capital."

I closed my eyes. I smelled the faint scent coming from her, different

from my own sweat or the muddy smell of the forest, ——it was the scent of a girl.

My heart calm down from that. Somehow, I feel that my thought process is kind of perverted but I needed some way to calm myself. And there is no way I would harbour any evil thoughts towards Mururu.

She is in her teens. The same age Aya had when she was summoned here.

If I tried to lay a hand on her, I will be an inexcusable pervert. In the first place I'll probably get beaten before I try something like that. When I think of that, all thoughts of actually doing something disappear from my mind. In fact, she feels more like a daughter to me.

I had only closed my eyes for a second.

[fumufumu. I am definitely telling this to Aya later.]

"Try to read the mood, you idiot."

[That aside, Renji.]

It didn't even try to refute it. Sometimes it really acts very humanlike.

[Will you protect me as well?]

"Have no fear."

While sighing, I got out from the hollow of the tree. I gave a wry smile, as if expecting something, as if I thought of something mischievous.

There were no zombies. Probably, that skeleton is not here either. I couldn't hear it nor could sense it. I'm not sure if that thing is really a descendant of the Demon God, I might be wrong. But, I'm sure that it will definitely try to attack me, who is wounded, over Mururu.

For now, I asked Mururu to hide herself inside that hollow of the tree. Now we just have to wait for it to jump on the bait that is me. Let's hope that it's an idiot simple enough to fall for a plan like this.

Slightly away from that tree hollow, I sat down with my back to a moderately big tree. My right hand still hurts but thanks to that, my head

feels clear.

“If we die, we die together partner.”

[..... I honestly don’t feel very happy about that.]

If possible, I hope it attacks is before its night time.

I wonder if I’m being too optimistic?

Now that I think about it, I wonder how much Mururu knows about me. Seeing that she wasn’t really surprised at Ermenhilde’s voice, she must know my connection Aya and the others—-to the heroes.

After the fight is over, I think I should ask her. For that reason as well, let’s just quickly get rid of that shitty skeleton. Thinking till that, I gave a sigh.

Was this a death flag?

Chapter 31 Forest of Rotting Souls (4)

*

I wonder how long I stood there exposed to the miasma. With the sound of grass rustling, I looked that way. What appeared was not our invisible attacker as I was hoping for. It's flesh was rotten, white bones could be seen; it was a rotting zombie. It was wearing a completely ragged piece of cloth, as if it had been attacked by a wild dog or something.

Like the zombies that appear in games, its limbs were intact but it was missing its lower jaw. Was that shitty skeleton watching us from somewhere?

"Well, I guess it can't be helped."

Heave-hoI stood up.

My waist, more like my whole body hurts. The miasma isn't the only reason my body feels so heavy. The pain in my right arm seems to be growing worse every minute. But it's not like I cannot move it. It hurts like hell but I can still put strength in it. I can still hold a sword.

But I don't know when I'll become unable to move it. Thinking about how I have to face that monster in such a condition, I feel like crying. After the first zombie, as if they had prearranged it, more of them appeared one by one.

[Quite a lot have gathered.]

"Seriously. I'm an injured guy here, I wish they'd take it easy a little—— don't you think so, Ermenhilde?"

As I muttered its name, a jade coloured long sword that I had grown accustomed to using appeared in my hand. It is the double edged long sword I am most used to using in this world. With a single swing, the sound of air cutting came to my ears.

Ah, this is it. This is the sword. My palms shifted to get accustomed to it. It has just the right weight. It feels as if it is an extension of my own arm. I realised that my face had relaxed a bit at that. On the end of the sword's grip were seven gems inlaid in a jade jewel. Three of them were currently lit.

My right arm pained again. But that pain only cleared my thoughts. It reminded me what I had to do.

"Let's make Mururu speechless."

[..... Are you alright?]

And actually worried voice came from inside my pocket. Finding it amusing, my lips relaxed into a smile.

"That's rare. Normally you would be the one who'll keep on telling to act like a hero."

The situation should be exactly what Ermenhilde is always wishing for, isn't it?

For someone, for something—– put your life on the line, and to protect it. It's what people expect of heroes. That was unparalleled strength, victory, and safety. Unfortunately, neither of those are things which I could grant them.

But, just for now, just for this moment. Let's gamble with my life on the line. I'll draw out that shitty skeleton, and kill it.

[Your face looks pale.]

"It's the same as usual."

Put strength in my arm that held the divine blade. Three zombies had appeared. The number isn't really that great but given time, that will also increase. Though that would not be good for Mururu who is supposed to be on the lookout of a chance to make a surprise attack, the undead relentlessly seek the living after all. They'll keep on coming here as long as living people are here.

But that is my aim. Well the one waiting for us is not a small fry like a

zombie or ghosts, it's a shitty skeleton that might be a descendant of the Demon God. With a voice only I and Mururu can hear, Ermenhilde gave an order to Mururu to not move.

My dominant right arm won't work here. There are no comrades to save me. Only three of the covenants had been released. My enemies are countless zombies and ghosts and a mysterious skeleton. Even though it's a despairing situation, for some reason I felt not even a fragment of despair.

Zombies continue to move through the grass towards me. Slowly, as if dragging their legs, scraping of their own flesh by hitting the roots of trees and raising a indescribable sound less voice of resentment. To kill the living me, to eat me and make me one of theirs.

"Injury, the poison, this hopeless situation——- this is not the first time I'm facing one!"

Forcefully moving my heavy body, I slashed. I aimed for the body with force strong enough to not just slice but to completely crush it. The rotting flesh, the damaged muscles, broken bones; I mowed it all down and split its body to 2 pieces. I split not its stomach but its heart. But that wasn't enough to kill it. Actually, I had aimed for its neck but my aim went wrong. The fact that I wasn't using my dominant arm, and maybe due to the fever I have, my senses have been disrupted. In any case, first I must face the zombies coming at me to live.

The zombie I cut apart fell down to the ground. And the next moment, crushed it's head with my right foot. That was the first one.

Going with the momentum, I slashed again. The zombie coming at me from behind was blown away. Maybe because it was a fresher corpse, and left-arm's power alone wasn't enough to split this one apart and my sword stopped in its shoulder. But I pulled it out with brute strength and blasted that zombie away.

[Renji, to the right!]

Complying with Ermenhilde's words, I jumped to the right. I rolled on the ground move away as pebbles and twigs hurt my skin. That kind of

hurt.

But, the third zombie was about to leap on to where I was standing before. If I had got bitten by those rotten teeth, I would definitely get poisoned or get some really weird disease.

The jade sword turned to magical energy disappeared, and it its place appeared a dagger which I threw which then, pierced into its head. Another dagger appeared in my hands. It was throw with my left hand but I have trained enough to be able to use both hands for throwing. Though not as fast as my right hand throws, if I aim properly before throwing, it will definitely hit its target, the zombie's face.

Silence. The short battle correct. Well, there were only three of them after all. Even goblins could be said be worse than this for now at least. After all, they are fast and work in teams.

While I was thinking of such things, once again the grass made noise. Newer zombies appeared. They must have been attracted due to the battle. Or maybe they simply smelt a living human. In any case, that doesn't change what I have to do.

I gave a quick glance towards my right arm. Blood was dripping out of the simple treatment I had done by wrapping a cloth around the wound.

"I really hope the main guy comes quickly."

[Yeah, that's true..... Think you can hold on till then?]

"I will, somehow."

I slashed away those zombies' heads as they move towards me.

Fuuu, I breathed out. The skeleton had yet not appeared. No, I simply had not sensed it and it was simply lurking around here. It is invisible, has no presence, and neither has any smell. Inside this rotting forest, it might be the worst enemy to face. If Aya was here, at least there was the option to completely burned down the whole forest along with it.

As I thought all that, more zombies appeared. Three again. Must have been villagers from nearby. There were two who were in tunics. The last

one, was probably a soldier from the capital. It was a zombie with quite the good equipment on it.

If this was a game, I would get lots of experience points from it. Oh well, zombies don't drop a lot of money even in games though. Thinking of such things, I calm myself again.

I wonder if Mururu has noticed already. So as to not let her realise that, I must fight flashily.

Aah, my hand really hurts. Flapping my mantle, I ran with a speed that blasted off soil behind me. With a single slash, I cut apart the legs of the two zombies in tunics. I stepped on one of the zombies' neck to crush it. The feeling of flesh and bone getting crushed came through my leather boots to me. It is disgusting but I cannot stop either. Going with the momentum, I closed in on the armoured zombie.

This one is troublesome. Even if I have Ermenhilde, I still need a lot of strength cut through armour. I doubt one slash will be enough. But, I'm also confident my skill. I aimed for the joints. My attack on its elbow was blocked by its gauntlet. It's really difficult to make detailed adjusted attacks with my left arm. Clicking my tongue on missing the attack, I jumped back to try again.

The next moment, it's long sword struck the place I was standing before. Without any technique, it was an attack based on brute strength due to its the ground had exploded a little. At the same time, a large amount of blood started flowing out of that zombie's right elbow. Did its rotting flesh snap, did its bone rip through the flesh?

The weapon in my hand turned to magical energy once again and then instantly formed a rapier.

"Too slow."

I pierced through the gap in its helmet.

[In terms of technique only, you're equal to all other heroes after all.]

"No way, I was just trained too well by that monster."

Once again the weapon in my hand disappeared by converting into magical energy. And then, once again a long sword appeared in my hand.

The strongest human I know of, the Knight commander, was the one who taught me the way of the sword. Daggers, long swords, heavy swords, Katanas. As for the remaining weapons, I simply taught myself how to use them during the journey. That's why, I am the most comfortable while using swords.

[..... It still hasn't come.]

"It's only normal."

[What?]

"If I was that skeleton, I would also try to kill my opponent with just zombies. There would be no need for me to show myself after all."

As I was talking, more zombies appear. This time, they were just human type, there were even animals like dogs, goblins and orcs.

Give me a break. I felt like crying.

[But that means——- it would never appear, isn't it?]

"Yes, exactly as you say."

As long as I had my dependable jade coloured long sword in my hand, my partner with me, I can keep on going like this.

It's really weird. Is this what trust is like?

While thinking of such foolish things, I kept on fighting even in this despairing situation. I'm not alone, to have someone to talk with you is really a important thing. I have two keep on fighting till our invisible attacker decides to show itself after all.

"—— let's do this."

[Yeah.]

My concentration heightened.

If it was me I would not show myself to the enemy. Because it's dangerous.

But that skeleton did appear back then. And by doing that, it made us realise that there was an enemy we could not see. Thanks to that, we ended up in this situation. I have to be reckless like this to make the enemy appear.

And after that, when it appears, I will crush it. Destroy it, literally. It's as simple as that.

.

.

.

"Wow—- that shitty skeleton really isn't showing itself."

[.....]

How many zombies have I killed already? By breaking was ragged. My left arm felt heavy. The pain in my right arm was also increasing constantly and my body was in a bad condition due to running out of stamina.

Ignoring my fatigue, I swung the jade divine blade. If I stopped, I will die. Zombies are slow, but are physically strong. If I get caught by them in my current condition, I will really be in danger. That's why I cannot stop. Disrupting the zombies by moving around, I cut off their heads and crush them down.

Along with the miasma of the forest, my own sweat was making me feel sick as well. From the blood spraying out of the zombies—- the dead humans, my mantle and my clothes had been completely dirtied. Looks like I'll have to buy a new set of clothes after this. Though not as bad as my right arm, the number of small wounds on my body also increased. They were not really expensive, but I was quite attached to these clothes.

"Let's buy some new clothes when we get to the capital."

[..... You are still quite relaxed, aren't you?]

"Not really, to be honest."

No matter how amazing the weapon, depending on its user, its power is

limited.

Monsters are much more used to fighting than people. Monsters, the Demon King – – – and even the Demon God. To fight such existences, technique alone is not enough. What's necessary is the power to fight. Just like the humans and Demi humans of this world use magic to fight, just like beast men like Mururu depend on physical ability to fight.

But I don't have any of those. I don't have any incredible cheat like Souichi and the others, neither do I have magical energy. All I have is the fighting technique I through literal desperation. I do not have overwhelming power needed to be called a hero. Technique that any could learn would always be defeated by absolute power.

"But, it looks like this farce will soon end..... Is Mururu fine?"

[Hm?]

If it's her, she should have already noticed.

The atmosphere of the area changed. It was very minute, but there was definitely a change. This was my intuition, that had been trained after getting someone to this world and going through countless fights. Distribution has saved my life countless times already. It's difficult to explain, but I do trust it. All that remains is for me to throw all of that shitty skeleton's attention towards me.

Ah, I really feel like crying, I have already worked so hard to defeat that Demon God after coming to this world. Why do I have two go through so much even after I completed my job?

Sound of wind cutting reached me. No—-

"it's here."

As I jumped backwards, the ground rumbled from the shockwave. The countless zombie corpses flew into the air.

Magic. That too, it is a wind shockwave type that's not visible. This really is a monster that is specialised in stealth moves. My mantle blew from the shockwave, and the mist like miasma distorted.

I'm specialised in close combat, so if I let it attack from long-range, I'll have no chance of winning. Well, it should also understand that as well. There was no surprise or impatience.

I will have to make that shitty skeleton think that it cannot defeat me with just magic. After facing the zombie army, this time I have to overcome invisible magic.

It will be easy, easy. I persuaded myself like that.

[Where did that come from!?]

"Who knows? If Aya or Feirona are here, they could probably sense the flow of magical energy to tell that though."

If a few more of my covenants had been released, I would have become able to do that as well. But that would be difficult in the current situation. I once again looked at the jewel set on the handle of my sword. Just like before, three of them were shining. It would have been so much easier if it actually told me exactly which one of the conditions had been cleared. I grumbled my complaint that I had thought of so many times.

I clicked my tongue then jumped, and hid myself in the hollow of different tree than Mururu.

In my line of vision, there was no distortion in the miasma. The place where the magic was fired was still swaying but that won't be the right direction. While I was thinking that, the tree I was hiding in got broken in half.

Clicking my tongue again, I moved to the shadow of a different tree. Protected by the tree, the shockwave didn't come to me but a sharp ran through my cheek. A fragment of wood had flew which sliced my cheek slightly. I wiped off the flowing blood with the back of my left hand.

"Could you see where that came from?"

[—sorry.]

"Don't mind it, I couldn't either."

It's really pathetic but first we have to find out where our enemy is.

Going by how the tree I was hiding in was broken, it isn't behind us. I peeked out from the cover of the tree and instantly, the tree was snapped. It didn't completely break apart but a chunk of wood the size of my head was blown off. That was proof that this skeleton's magic power wasn't normal. If that had hit me directly, my head would have been blown away completely.

Not just its tail attack, even its magic is top class. That black Orc I fought in that village also used magic but this is on a different level. Even though they're both descendants of the Demon God, howcome they have such a difference in ability? Is it related to their faith and piety to the Demon God maybe? Though there shouldn't be much difference between a pig and a skeleton. Seeing as the pig has a brain at least, it should have more faith right?

Rather than such useless things, let's focus on how to find this shitty skeleton right now.

I couldn't figure out where the attack came from even during the last attack. Though the wind shockwave itself may be invisible, it shouldn't be able to hide the distortions in the mist as well.

"What should I do?"

[You talk as if we have lots of options to decide what to do next.]

"That's true, I guess. As expected of my partner, you sure get to the point."

I was successful in luring it out, now as long as I can make it visible––

While I thought till that, something fell down from the sky. While breaking the branches of trees, a giant 3m bone fell to the ground. It must be light since it was only a bone since it didn't create much of a tremor on falling. Since the shockwave was less, it soon began moving again. It seems it didn't take much damage either. And, after a second, Mururu came down beside me.

"I found it."(mururu)

"So it seems."

As Mururu told me that as if it was perfectly normal, I could only shrug my shoulders. She had already gone into combat mode.

And next, we both jumped out of the cover of the tree. But, as if it was expecting it, it slammed its whiplike tail to the ground. Was it trying to intimidate us? Must be because it became visible after taking damage from falling down.

“The tail..”(mururu)

“Hm?”(renji)

“Sorry. I was unable to destroy its tail.”

“No need to apologise. In fact, I’m glad that you were at least able to find it for me.”

So it was above in the trees. Well, I wouldn’t have realized that. Since it was so big, I had not thought of that possibility. But apparently, since its just bones, its actually pretty light in weight seeing as it didn’t make much of a sound even though it fell from so high.

I wanted to rush in to attack while it was still disoriented but, that tail really is in the way.

“It’s amazing you sensed it there actually.”(renji)

“I was too slow. I had been faster.....”

“I said don’t mind it. You did save me.”

[.....You’re being pretty kind with this beastwoman aren’t you?]

Not really, I think.

The skeleton fully recovered. 8 spiderlike legs and the body of a snake. The swinging whiplike tail mowed down the trees and a head that had a horn like an ogre’s.

“Let’s split up. The one that doesn’t get attacked by the tail will aim to destroy it.”(renji)

“Got it.”

At the same time, I ran towards the right and Mururu ran to the left.

The tail's target was —Mururu. It must have concluded that Mururu was more dangerous than me.

"Ermenhilde, let's do this!"

[Yeah!!]

In place of my jade long sword, a giant hammer appeared in my hands. I held it with both my hands but it wasn't actually that heavy. Resting the hammer on my shoulders, I ran with it. Against bones, shock type weapons work better. Swords are easier swords are easier to use, but hammers have more power. I can break its tail with one strike.

The giant hammer portion was Jade green and its handle was golden. At the end of the handle a Jade jewel was present and the number of gems shining inside it were for. With a speed higher than what I had against zombies, I quickly rushed towards the rear of the skeleton.

The fight between Mururu and the skeleton had already begun. Mururu swiped away the attacks from the tail, that had a speed I could finally follow with my eyes now, with her claws. The matter how strong her claws were she won't be able to take on the attacks from the tail forever. My aim was the root/joint of the tail.

But apparently my intentions were seen through and an invisible magic ball attack was fired towards me. With the help of the distortions in the mist and my own intuition I was able to avoid a direct hit but, my movement speed fell down. I ended up clicking my tongue but I couldn't fall back right now. If I did I would only increase the burden on Mururu. That alone I must avoid. No matter if it was Mururu on me that ran towards it, the skeleton made for a tough opponent.

Avoiding the magic ball, I sweep it away. The number of magic balls it was firing towards me was too great. I felt astonished at the amount of magical energy this thing possessed. Also, due to the magic balls, the zombie corpses that were getting blown here and there were getting in my way. I ended up having to dodge through this surprise barrage of corpses as well.

To be able to face both of us alone, it truly is a descendant of the

Demon God. It's on a completely different level from that Black Orc and ogre. It's a strong enemy I have fought many times alongside Souichi and the others—– with the heroes.

[Are you alright, beast woman!?]

"It's not beast woman, my name is Mururu."

Reacting to Ermenhilde's voice, I also looked towards Mururu. She had fallen back quite a lot from the place she had first started fighting the skeleton. With that small physique of hers, the burden from the attacks of the tail must be more than I thought.

But due to the excessive magic balls, I couldn't close in either. The blood of the zombies blowing apart mixed in with the mist becoming a red smokescreen. And in the middle of that battlefield student 3 m spiderlike, snakelike skeleton.

It's as if I'm facing the devil. I muttered to myself.

"Tch."

It really is very strong. Just because it prefers ambushing and surprise attacks doesn't mean it was weak, I guess.

While facing off against Mururu, it is able to fire so many magic balls towards me as well. There's a chance it might even use a wide range magic if we were to give it the composure to use it. If it actually use that, I'm one thing, but Mururu will definitely not come out of that safe.

We couldn't stop our attack at any cost. But, it was a fact that we couldn't close in on it either. If only another one of my covenants had been released——

While slipping through the rain of magic balls, I ended up thinking of such stupid things. The only one I could clear right now, was the permission/approval from the goddess Astrarea. Just that alone. The other two, I definitely cannot clear right now.

[Tchh—– Renji, the beast woman is in danger!]

"I know!"

Glancing towards Mururu, she had stopped taking on the tail attacks and was now is just dodging them.

Sorry, I could only apologise inside my head. If only I could destroy the tail quickly. But due to facing that zombie army just now, I'm also low on stamina. My right hand's pain has gotten so worse than it has gone numb. Let alone my hammer, I'm not sure if I will be able to swing a sword properly. I'm currently going on solely on adrenaline. Once that wears out, I will become unable to move. Before that, I must defeat the skeleton.

I still continue to dodge the magic bullets. Suddenly a Donsound, different from the magic ball striking the ground, resounded in my ears. When I looked towards Mururu, the skeleton's tail had pierced into a tree.

My thoughts cleared. Without even trying to think what had happened, I quickly rushed towards the skeleton. Putting strength in my arm holding Ermenhilde, at the same time Jade green coloured magical energy gushed out.

In an instant, I was exactly beside the skeleton. I ran,ran and ran——!!

"Go to hell!!"

The Skeleton pulled out its tail from that tree and moved.

But it was too slow.

Before it could react, I brought down the hammer. The Jade green magical energy converged and disappeared right in the middle of the tail.

At the same time, it fired countless magic balls towards the defenceless me who was currently in a swinging motion. I rolled on the ground countless times before finally stopping after hitting a zombie corpse. It reeks of blood, or rather smells of rotting flesh.

But finally, the first step was over. I stood up using the hammer as support. Seeing Mururu's rare worried face, I ended up showing a smile.

"Now the real thing starts."

[Yes, let's do this. We have to quickly defeat it and then search for Aya

and the others as well after all.]

Seriously. This is not even the end. There are so many things I have to do. That alone made me depressed.

[We need to treat your wounds as well.]

“Unfortunately, you can’t do anything about it. I’ll try and have Ms Francesca treat me.”

[……..]

Yeah. My whole body hurts like hell.

Well, this never was an easy opponent from the start. When I looked towards Mururu, she did not have any signs of giving up right now. But, she was breathing heavily. Facing the tail must have taken a toll on her stamina.

Our opponents still has its magic and there is a chance it might have some other trump card as well. It is the type that uses surprise attacks even though it’s so strong. Though it’s not good to be overcautious, it would be stupid to get overconfident of our victory as well.

“Let’s finish this, Ermenhilde, Mururu!”

[Yeah, it’s time to settle this battle.]

“…… Got it.”(Mururu)

Mururu spoke in her usual soft voice. It’s difficult to hear, but it’s very like her.

I felt a bit calmed from that. And fight, win, survive, meet up with Aya and the others, and then head to the capital.

For that––

“I am the one who killed your master!”(Renji)

I don’t know if it understood my words. But my attack, my Jade green magical energy, it should understand who I am. As if it switched its target from Mururu to me, it turned its skeleton face towards me.

Yes, that’s right. I killed him. On that hellish battlefield. In that place

where countless people died, countless lives were lost.

For just a second, I closed my eyes.

Black, Black, Black, Black—— I killed that Demon God, that had the shell of the colour of darkness, with my comrades, together with them.....
With Ermenhilde.

“I will kill you, you fucking skeleton.”

As I opened my eyes, I spoke what I had sworn.

As if howling without vocal cords, it struck it’s spiderlike 8 bone legs on the ground.

Chapter 32 Forest of Rotting Souls (5)

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Avoiding the strike from the legs of the skeleton, I closed the distance between us along with Mururu. It must be trying to prepare for a big magic attack. After having its tail destroyed, the skeleton's movements have become dull.

The restraining barrage of magic also lessened, and it was just frantically attacking us with its legs. Me aside, there's no way it could strike Mururu with attacks like that. It's eight legs were still in full health but it's rib-like bones were in tatters.

But even then, it wasn't using magic right now. But at the same time, even though it was getting attacked by Mururu so much, it did not leave a gap for me to close in on it. Had my own movements gotten duller? Or was it simply cautious against me? While wielding the hammer, I clicked my tongue for the nth time as my attack was thwarted again.

[What happened, Renji?]

"It's nothing."

My breathing got rougher. Before I knew it I had run out of breath. And to think that I was actually quite proud of my stamina.

While holding the hammer with both hands, I glanced at my right hand. That wound. The fact that I have stopped feeling pain from it means it really must be turning very dangerous. That alone made me feel like giving up, but I couldn't do that just yet. I ended up strangely laughing instead at that. Seriously..... Why do I always get involved in such troublesome things? Do I just have bad luck, or am I being haunted/possessed by something? The fact that I could actually think of something /someone like that, I was left speechless.

"You're worried about me?"(Renji)

[.....Muu]

“I’ll be fine. I hate fighting, but I don’t plan on losing.”

When I said that, I could feel surprise coming from Ermenhilde. This one is so easy to understand. Maybe that’s why, it’s my partner.

I don’t plan on losing. I cannot lose.—– if I did, I will die. I’ll pass on dying inside this remote forest.

“This is why I hate duking it out with monsters.”

[.....Hm?]

“It’s nothing. Let’s go, Ermenhilde—–”

I gave a glance towards Mururu, and without any need to talk, we both charged towards the skeleton together.

The skeleton is definitely concentrating more on me, I can feel it.

I avoided it’s attack that could split opening round. Next, I use my momentum to quickly close in on it but, it used its other leg and swung an attacked towards me. I blocked this attack with the handle of my hammer.

“——Guhh!?”

The force behind it was incredible, at the same time my right hand hurt again. Due to this one attack, I was quickly distanced away from it again. It’s a blessing that I don’t get blown away like from the attack of the tail but, there is simply too much of a gap in the physical strength of monsters and humans. The fact that we still have two win this is exactly what makes this difficult. If we hadn’t been split away from Aya and the others, I wouldn’t have hesitated even a second before running away from an opponent of this level.

While I was taking on it’s attack, Mururu to close the distance with the skeleton and slashed at its body. Those sharp claws shaved off the bone and created cracks on it. We’re definitely, slowly, driving it towards a corner. At a single glance I could tell the amount of wounds had grown on the skeleton’s body.

But even then, somewhere deep in my mind I was still feeling a bit of unease. Will an enemy as strong and fearsome as this go down so easily. There is no way that would happen.

“You okay?”(Mururu)

“yeah, no problem here. You?”

Mururu, who had appeared beside me before I could realise, asked me that.

Her worried gaze as she looked up towards me made me feel a bit awkward/embarrassed.

Mururu as well was starting to run out of breath. On looking closely, I realised that her pure white clothes and hair had become dirty. There were small bleeding wounds here and there on her white skin as well.

I really want this fight to end soon, so that she can take a bath at least. Though, if a guy like me said it, I’ll be treated like a pervert.

As we stood together, the skeleton stored moving and just assessed situation probably because it was cautious of both of us being together. Even when it is about to use magic, it did give off any specific sensation.

“I can still go on.”(Mururu)

“then, I’ll take on its attack. Just like before, you close in and strike at it.”

“….. You sure?”

“Yes, I will be fine.”

She must have realised from the irregularity in my voice. Not just her gaze, even her voice sounded worried. To give her a sense of relief, I gave a smile……. Though I hope my lips aren’t cramping.

It can be helped. I don’t have much experience of giving a smile while being aware of it. I don’t know how she took my smile that I gave while glaring at the skeleton, I did feel that Mururu calmed down a bit.

“Let’s just finish this already. I’m starting to get tired of this.”

“Un.”

[You guys really lack a sense of tension, you know.....]

“As if I’d get tensed from a danger of this level.”

Both me and Mururu gave a slight smile at Ermenhilde’s words.

It’s not like we’re facing some overpowered monster, there is no way I’ll feel tensed. The skeleton is definitely above my skill level, but I know monsters far stronger than this shitty skeleton.

It might sound strange but fighting and extremely strong enemy adds to your experience. And I have definitely fought monsters that are much much stronger than this skeleton. That experience, the fact that I was able to survive against those monsters, is one of the very few weapons I possess.

“Let’s go!”(Renji)

“Yeah.”

In the first place, it’s not like I have any other actions to choose from. I cant avoid this skeleton’s attack, and that skeleton only aims for me. Then, I can only act as bait. It’s not really different from our original strategy. Well, it’s so amateurish that it really can’t be even called a strategy though.

Once again, I ran towards the skeleton with Mururu. As expected aim was still me as those spiderlike legs came towards me. I took on that attack, and averted it. At the same time, Mururu closed in to deal in an attack. But this time the enemy is way of protecting was different. Suddenly, a chill ran down my spine and I had a bad premonition.

“It’s coming!!”

The next moment, the ground beneath Mururu rose and attacked by becoming spears of stone. But as if she had already seen through that attack, Mururu use those protruding Spears as foothold and made a leap. And with that momentum dealt a attack to the skeleton’s head. What agility! So this is what it means to be left speechless.

It's not like she has some kind of cheat like us either. There are few who are able to fight like that even then. Even if she is a beast woman, that was really incredible.

But, I can't just stand here amazed. The magic that attack Mururu activated once again even while it took damage.

"Kuh!?"

[Dodge, Renji!!]

Don't ask the fucking impossible!!

I was able to avoid a direct hit but, my left leg got cut. This is getting really ridiculous, that shitty skeleton. Can go invisible, can use magic, and is also a fucking descendant of the Demon God.

While frowning from the pain in my leg, I avoided the second and the third spear. Just when I was thinking that it was only attacking from below, an invisible magic ball was fired towards me. Unable to sense that surprise attack, I blocked it with my hammer's handle only to get blown away. Fortunately it hit the handle, but I won't get lucky the second time. I quickly stood up, and began running. For the time being, I must keep on moving otherwise I'll get killed by getting pierced by those spears. My newly wounded leg also hurt but I decided to ignore it.

Mururu was moving even better than me but even she was unable to find a chance to close in. Stone spears and invisible magic balls, and even attacks from the eight bone legs. She's facing an even worse situation than me, it's amazing that she is still avoiding any direct hit.

I was a bit bewildered due to the sudden fierce attack but, the enemy doesn't get time to relax either. After all, it had also taken quite a lot of damage. I put more strength in my arm holding the hammer. I must get in an attack somehow. And finish it off.

But, how?

I questioned myself. It's attacks were fierce, I won't be able to slip through all that. Now that my left leg is hurt as well, I am in a situation where even running is difficult. Even though I'll get killed if I stopped, I

need to find a way to kill my opponent as well.

[..... Are you, okay?]

“Do I look like okay?”

Without answering to Ermenhilde’s worries, I questioned it back instead. I only got silence in reply. It’s only normal. After all, my right hand is in a condition where I cant even feel the pain from my own, not to mention the amount of small wounds on my body are only growing in number. And one of the newest wounds on that list is on my legs that is pretty much my lifeline right now. Now I’m not even sure how long I can continue moving around.

It’s now or never right now. But then again, I only have 4 of my covenants released. It’s far from satisfactory. Against a descendant of this level, I’m not sure if this much power would be enough to take it down.

“But, of well, I can’t give either anyway.”

I can’t lose. I must not lose here.

Even in such a deadly situation, I cannot give up. I must face it on. To not get killed, I must kill it first. I must continue fighting.

Even though I hate that style of living. Even though that lifestyle is similar to that of a hero from which I had run away.

I’m being made to take up that style living once again.

It’s the situation Ermenhilde has always been wishing for. But that Ermenhilde was currently being worried for me rather than focusing on the enemy skeleton. If you’re going to proclaim yourself as just a weapon, then don’t hold emotions like that, seriously. That’s why I don’t want to see you as just a weapon. And if you wish for the Hero Yamada Renji, then just put all your trust in me.

But I who never believes in absolute victory––am definitely not a Hero.

Me and Ermenhilde. We are neither a Hero nor a weapon. We’re just a pair of a human who killed a God and his partner who completely trusts in him.

That's all, I want. That's how it should be.

"Now, then...."

I faced the skeleton. His empty eyesocket's glare pierced through me.

In its supposedly non-existent gaze, I could feel it confident of its victory. Even though its just a mere skeleton.

"Don't underestimate me, you fucking skeleton."

The next moment, its left half along with its four legs disappeared in a ray of heat. At the sudden appearance of the intense blinding light, I used my left hand to cover my eyes. That magic attack bore through the ground, split the clouds and pierced the heavens above. In this world where sun had already set, the radiance of midday sun appeared for a few seconds. There was only one in this whole world who could use a magic of that level of power. I did trust in them but.....finally confirming their safety, I truly felt relieved. All that happened in an instant but was definitely real. Having lost its one half, the skeleton fell to the ground. It felt as if it was an animal bowing towards a powerful being. Well, the powerful being here is not me though.

".....What just?"(Mururu)

"As usual, she's really flashy."(renji)

I only replied that to Mururu's mutterings.

I started walking towards the fallen skeleton. It didn't try to attack me with magic any more. You need to concentrate a lot to use magic. Having lost four of its legs, even as a skeleton, it should be difficult for it to concentrate properly.

Feeling not even a shred of sympathy for that skeleton, I went close to its head and raised my hammer.

It's one horned ogre-like skull rose up slightly as it looked straight at me.

"___"

And just like that, without saying anything, I crushed it's head.

No matter how harsh the battle had been, the end is always like this. No sense of excitement, completely anticlimactic. If a movie had such a finale, it would be at the level that the audience would start asking for their money back. This is even more so against monsters. Since we cannot understand each other's words, there is no reason to even ask for their last words.

Remaining in the same pose after ringing my hammer down, I breathed a sigh.

"I'm tired."(Renji)

[That's the first thing you have to say?.....]

"But it's very typical of me to do so right?"

[It's pathetic..... How deplorable.]

Well, sorry.

The hammer disappeared by turning into Jade coloured magical energy, and my body lost all its strength. With the descendant of the Demon God dead, most of my released covenants closed again. It really is pathetic.

"It's over?"(Mururu)

"Yeah."

The skeleton turned to black mud and disappeared into the ground. It's the same as the previous descendants of the Demon God I had fought. After confirming it till the very end, finally I sat down on the ground.

"That attack, was that you Renji?"(Mururu)

"That wasn't me. It was Aya."

On seeing the hole at our camp, I had realised that they were underground but I never would have thought that she would fire magic from underground. There was a chance that either Mururu or me would have also get hit by it and have half of our bodies blown away.

Thinking that made me shudder but, well, all is well that ends well. Let's leave it at that. If I started pondering too much on that, I'll probably

become unable to sleep.

Beside the hole that had been created from the magic attack that had destroyed the skeleton, both me and Mururu sat down. By the way, the size of the hole was 2 m in diameter. Both me and Mururu would have definitely perished if that attack had grazed us even a little..... I should stop thinking about that. It's bad for my heart.

"You okay?"(Renji)

"Just tired."(Mururu)

[..... What are you two, peas in a pod?]

"Really?"(Mururu)

"We aren't that similar."(Renji)

Having run out of things to talk to, we both silently just stared at the hole.

After fighting so hard, almost dying, yet not giving up..... In the end, Aya just ended it all with a surprise attack out of nowhere.

I've always thought about it, somehow I feel like I always end up in such a situation.

Even after fighting so hard, the best portion/role is taken away by Souichi or Aya, or my other comrades. No, well, I'm satisfied as long as I survive though.

While I'm thinking of this, Mururu, who was sitting beside me, looked towards me.

"Was I good?"(Mururu)

"Yeah, you were great. Well done."(Renji)

I lightly patted her head in the same way I used to do Aya and the others back then.

Her smooth and silky hair felt nice.

[What are you doing?]

“Praising her.”(Renji)

[Why?]

“Just felt like it.”

While spent time like that, I heard voices coming from the new hole.

After waiting for a while, finally a slender arm reached out. Mururu went on guard but, I recognised that hand. When I held it and pulled, I saw a familiar face. After seeing that face, I finally, from the bottom of my heart, felt really. Her soft and gentle arm was really girlish. On pulling her out of the hole, she was completely covered in dirt. Not just her clothes, her hair and face as well. And above all, her clothes were sticking to her body very closely. But Ms Francesca has an amazing body, so frankly speaking, it was a very tempting view.

“So you’re safe, Ms Francesca?”(Renji)

Averting my gaze from her dirty, yet alluring figure, I asked her so.

“Ah, Renji-sama!”

“You really should stop with the ‘-sama’ already.”

After pulling Ms Francesca, next, Feirona appeared from the hole. He was the same as Ms Francesca, completely covered in dirt and soil. His clothes were wet as well. Did they fall into some underground water body or something?

“What’s happening?”(Renji)

“Aya-dono is pushing us up with her magic.”

“I see.”

So Aya used flight magic on these two to bring them out of the hole. She really is skilful. Neither of them had any visible wounds either. There just covered in mud. It’s amazing how she was able to make both of them come out of the hole uninjured without hitting any rocks even once when she probably doesn’t even have any source of light underground.

Last one should be Aya herself. As I pulled Feirona out as well, he uses

hands to wipe away the dirt from his hair and clothes. He looks good even while doing something like that. Though, he failed it actually moving the dirt.

"We were worried because you suddenly disappeared, you know."(Renji)

"We got attacked by monsters. And above all, the ground rumbled below us just when we were stuck."(Elf)

"so it seems. It's quite a big hole."

As I said that while recalling the hole at the campground, Ms Francesca became pale faced.

Well, the fact that you survive even after falling from such a hole, I would say that you guys are really lucky.

"And there was a huge army of slimes underground as well. It was great that Aya-sama was with us."(Francesca)

"..... Slimes."

[..... Slimes, eh.]

Both Mururu and Ermenhilde muttered at the same time.

Slimes. Unicellular organisms with jellylike soft bodies. Physical attacks don't affect them much. They are like natural enemies to me and Mururu. It seems Mururu was also aware of that fact has she muttered the name in an annoyed voice.

I as well, do not have good memories regarding slimes either.

Even though it's the lowest class of monster in games, its actually pretty troublesome in the real-life.

Swords and spears to not work but flaming torches or magic attacks are effective. It's body fluids have various effects ranging from poisoning or paralysing enemy to dissolving the armour worn and lowering the person's defence. Due to that, I can't even count how many times I saw hell. Especially, due to the women in our group.

As I recalled the various tragedies brought upon me by slimes, Feirona's

sight turned towards my right arm.

“It seems you guys had your own fair share of trouble as well.”

He said that as he looked at my wounds. As if finally seeing my condition, Ms Francesca gasped as she hid her mouth with her hand.

“Yeah, I came close to dying. I only survived thanks to Mururu.”

“Un.”

Mururu puffed her chest with pride. It was so charming that all three of us started laughing.

Finally, the slender arm appeared from the hole.

“yokkoi, sho!” (T/N: I don’t know how to translate this. It’s basically like a grunting sound or ‘heave-ho’ you do when you do something that strains your body.)

I really don’t think a young girl should be speaking like that.

Aya, who appeared from the hole, was the same as the other two, covered in mud and dirt. The dirt must have stuck due to the liquids from the slimes.

Normally she always looks dignified and has an adult like beauty but her current face was very childish.

“Yo.”(renji)

“.....Eh?”(aya)

“That’s quite the face you have there.”

When I said that, she silently began going back into the hole. She sure is fast, I ended up giving a tsukkomi inside my head. Are you a mole?

“C’mon, come out already. We need to prepare for camp as well.”(renji)

I grabbed her wrist and pulled her out. Without resisting much, Aya came out easily. The reason she felt so light must be because I properly used the edge of the hole as a scaffold and actually used some strength. She came out so easily, it was a bit anticlimactic.

Since it's her, she must have not wanted to be seen covered in dirt so I was sure she would resist. Just l8ike how she looks like an adult, she also despises to be seen when she's weak.

She doesn't want to be always seem like a perfect being but she tries to always show her stronger side, I think.

"You alright?"(renji)

"I'm—-wait, Renji-san, you're injured!?"(aya)

"Yeah. Mururu as well."

Aya started touching my wound without any restraint making it hurt more. I had already done some basic emergency treatment so the wound had already bled so much that the cloth wrapped around it was dyed in red. The wound is not that big but it bled quite a lot. While I was thinking that, suddenly, my legs lost all strength. Huh, without understanding what happened, I fell on my backside.

[Renji?]

Ermenhilde's voice seemed distant. And her voice wasn't worried over the fact that I had fallen but was confused because it didn't understand why I suddenly fell.

Even I, myself, am not sure why this is happening. Just when I was thinking that, this time, my whole body lost strength.

After defeating the skeleton, meeting up with my comrades, I must have relaxed myself too much. How pathetic. To faint from just that much.

I tried apologising but only my lips moved without releasing any sound.

After moving my lips uselessly a few times, even doing that felt annoying.

I closed my eyes.

The world went completely dark.

—-Someone was shaking me. That voice was reverberating like an echo but I can't make out what it means.

I’m tired.

That’s why, I let go of my consciousness.

Chapter 33 Road to the Capital (3)

*

Who was it that was crying?

Due to the major portions of the castle, that was probably carved out from a rock-face, having been destroyed, the ceiling had disappeared and the sky was visible. The sky was a brilliant azure and the sun shined at its brightest. Along with the beautiful wind, it should have made one feel pleasant but it only made me feel more irritated right now.

The sound of swords clashing, magic exploding, the terrain in the surroundings getting destroyed, the cries of those fucking monsters, the desperate voices of my comrades, and the voice right beside me that was calling me——all of them felt irritating.

I won't be able to hear it, like this.

Her last words.

The voice of ___, who was disappearing right inside my embrace.

"Sorry."

When I said that, the girl in my arms laughed as if troubled. Even though red blood was flowing out of her body due to getting slashed by the dark Demon God. But even so, she laughed. So that her last expression was neither crying nor a pained one——but one that was smiling.

It was so painful to look at her like this that I put more strength in my arms holding her.

But even so, as if my comrade beside me couldn't see her in my arms, they shook my shoulders. Called my name in a loud voice.

"Even though I said I'd protect you. Even though——I promised you."

Once again, the girl laughed. This time, with a smile, she shook her head.

Her golden hair swayed, and her jade-green coloured eyes became softer. That expression that she'd show occasionally was so beautiful that if it was not for the fact that she was bleeding out right in my arms, one would have completely fallen in love with her.

But even the red blood, the source of life, only made her look more beautiful.

As I gently caressed her cheek, her lips moved slightly. But I heard no words. Only, her lips moved.

Aah, why am I always like this? Unable to protect those who I really want to. Always getting protected by others, the weakest Hero. A failure who can't utilise his own power properly. Why? Why? Why? —— Why did I ask for this kind of power? If it was going to be this saddening, if it was going to be this painful.....

"__"

In memories, a noise disrupted her words. I can't recall it. Her last words.

An immense magic shook the world. The slash from the Brave and the Demonic Sword user, the breath from the Ancient Dragon, the attack from the Demon Lord; turned the castle of the Demon God into rubble.

Everyone is fighting hard, working together. They are trying to defeat the enemy of the world. Even then I, the one who holds the weapon to defeat that enemy held not the weapon but her instead.

I held her small, soft, blood-stained, warm hand. Even though this wasn't the first time I did so, it felt like it was.

It felt as if it was not ___'s hand anymore, and as if to not forget that sensation, I put it near my cheek.

"You'll get dirty."

"Like I care. It's your blood."

“.....As usual, you’re such a fool.”

Yeah, that’s right. I’m a fool. An utter fool. An idiot who can’t protect anything he wants to. And even then, I still wish to protect her.....a hopeless, irredeemable fool.

And she said ____ to me. Because I was like this, she said ____ to me. That’s why I swore that I won’t change the way I live.

Before my comrades, before the world, before the Demon God, I chose this girl in front of me.

And, that girl looked at me with a smile.

“Don’t cry.”

At her voice, I finally realized who was crying.

It was me. I was the one who was crying.

“.....Don’t cry, idiot.”

Even though she’s about to die, ____’s voice was gentle and warm as always. Her hand holding me started losing strength so I put more strength in my hand and held her even more tightly. Even though I’m holding her so tight that it should be painful, let alone cry in pain, ____ didn’t even show a change in her expression.

She simply, kept on looking at me with a smile.

“I, rather than your crying face.....like your smiling face more.”

She laughed. With a smile, the smile I loved, she told that to me.

Till the very end, with a smile. With a dazzling, almost painful to watch, smile.

“That’s why, don’t cry.”

That’s why, I made a promise.

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When I opened my eyes, a familiar ceiling entered my view. A magnificent chandelier hung on the wooden ceiling. Moving my head to look to the side, very expensive, thick curtains hung over the glass windows.

A fire seemed to be burning in the fireplace as the room was perfectly warm. Judging by the water drops forming on the window, it should be pretty cold outside.

Looking back towards the ceiling again, I gave a sigh.

“Ermenhilde?”

I called but there was no answer. It wasn’t by my side it seems making me sigh again.

I am pretty certain that I know where I am right now. This place––this room is the one that had been allotted to me. After being summoned here, I resided in this room while I learnt more about this world. Whether it be the alignment of the furniture or the view from the window, both felt nostalgic. As the tension in my body left, I relaxed into my bed again.

But, I can’t understand how I’m here. After the battle in that forest..... whatever happened to that shitty Skeleton?

“__”

When I tried to get up, a pain ran through my right arm. On looking I realized that it had been bandaged. Oh right, I had taken quite a lot of damage from that skeleton.

After that, after meeting up with Aya and others––I have not a single bit of memory. I must have stayed fainted for the whole time. I recalled that my condition headed towards the worse after getting my right arm damaged. I must have been poisoned back then as well. It must be due to that poison that my body feels so sluggish. Even moving a little feels like a pain.

While confirming the condition of my body, I felt amazed that I actually survived after all that. Let alone Ms Francesca, even Aya or Feirona cannot use detoxifying magic. Apparently you cannot detoxify a poison if you don't understand its composition perfectly. No matter how much of a genius magician Aya is, she's still only 18. On top of that, in a world like this where science is very lacking in progress, there's no way they could learn about poisons and its composition. A poison from a descendant of the Demon God wouldn't have any antidote easily available either. Obviously, unlike games, this world doesn't have a single antidote for all kinds of poisoning.

Thus, only Yayoi-chan and one more has the ability in this whole world to nullify the Demon God's poison. If this really is the Imnesia Royal Castle as I think it is, then I must have been cured by the Witch of the Capital.

"yawn.."

While I kept thinking of such things, I ended up yawning while feeling sleepy. Is body still tired or have I simply overslept and still want to sleep? I don't even know the current situation but since I wasn't woken up means that it must not be an emergency. While I tried to keep my consciousness as I felt more sleepy, finally I realized that someone else was also in the room.

That certain black haired person was currently sleeping while sitting on a chair and using her hand on the table in front of her as a pillow. I could easily recognise that face.

"Oi, Aya."

I called out but there was no response. She must be in deep sleep. Sleeping in that pose is gonna make her body hurt all over later though, I think.

After trying to call her a few more times, I gave up on waking her. Well, the room is warm, she won't catch a cold at least. Though I feel like I'll get scolded for looking at her sleeping face later though. Well, I'll deal with that when it comes. Since I had nothing else to look at, I decided to

observe her sleeping face. Since she's always acting uptight and dignified, such moments are precious. I'll tease her later.

Her eyelids and her small shoulders moved as she breathed. Her expression was also gentler suitable of her age. Her usual expression also suits her but her current expression had a charm of its own. She's called an honour student back at the academy but I wonder if she sleeps through her classes or not. I wonder how many boys have seen her face like this.

But soon I got bored of that as well and I once again started looking outside the window. How should I say this, I am too used to seeing her sleep like this. After all she always slept before me when we were journeying.

Since it still hurts to move my body, I'll have to just laze around like this.

"....."

Royal capital Imnesia. Located at the centre of the continent, it's the largest city. With the 4 great cities in every direction, this is the capital where the king lives.

From the forest of rotting souls, where my memories ended, it should have still taken 5 days even with horses to get here. It's really amazing I survived that long of a journey while being poisoned.

Suddenly, the door was knocked. Without waiting for a reply, the door was opened and a familiar woman's face peeked in.

"Ah, so you're awake."

As if she was here just to chat, she spoke. I'm an injured guy here who had fainted due to my wounds you know. Well, if I were to say that, it will not end well for me, in fact I'll probably get scolded for making Aya and the others worry or something like that.

Somehow, I can never win with words against her. I have lost so many times that I have become consciously aware of that fact that I'll lose an argument.

While playing with her flaxen hair drooping from her shoulders, she slowly closed the door back. To make sure that Aya didn't wake up, I didn't even hear a small sound. She really is skilled.

She wore a magician like robe and a had glasses, that were rare in this world. Her slightly reddish eyes that showed her strong will looked directly at me without wavering. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who thinks that her gaze is scary. As she walked over the carpet without making even a single sound, she really did give off the feeling of a Witch seen in legends and fables. Though, once again, I was perfectly aware of what was waiting for me if I said that out loud.

Since it'd be weird to stay lying down like this, I tried to get up when her gaze seemed to have become slightly warmer. Was she worried about me?

Probably, I think. Her gaze and presence was scary but I know that this woman isn't really that cold. She must have been worried about me, I think. But well, the fact that she's here means that my deductions weren't wrong. I ended up sighing again.

"So we really are at the Imnesia Castle?"(renji)

"Yes. You were brought in with incredible wounds, Yamada-kun."

While saying that, the Witch of the capital slightly caressed the sleeping Aya's hair.

——Utano-san.

Utano-san's finger must have felt nice since Aya's sleeping expression felt even gentler. They looked so much like a family that I felt pleasant as well. And, though it was easy to understand, Aya did have affection for Utano-san like she was her mother. Whenever she had trouble she'd go to Utano-san as well. I think she does so even now. I felt a bit jealous of their relationship to be honest.

Having realized my gaze, Utano-san looked at me with a teasing gaze.

"If you look at a girl's sleeping face so seriously, you'll be treated as a pervert you know?"

“How rude. I wasn’t looking that seriously.”

“fufu. No matter what Yamada-kun is thinking, this girl wouldn’t really mind it though.”

As she kept on caressing Aya’s hair, her hand then reached Aya’s cheek. As if it tickled, Aya shrunk back from it. It was as if she was a cat.

“After all, her special person saw her sleeping face. That’s very important you know.”(utanoO

“.....”

I could only avert my gaze from Utano-san who said that.

I could also predict what she’d say next. That’s why I simply decided to look out of the window instead. Ahh, where the hell is Ermenhilde?

“Treasure them properly.”(utano)

“I do. In my own way, that is.”

Her gaze cold and sharp and turned towards me. But still, I can’t help it.

It’s very vague what Aya and I want from each other. If I tried to change that, I would only fail. Probably.

“It seems even after a year, your incompetence hasn’t changed at all.”(utano)

“.....so harsh. I’m not trying to be incompetent you know?”

“If it was me, I’d take a more straight approach.”

“Well, that’s how you always are after all.”

I’m, unlike you, not strong enough to believe in myself. Aya is.....I don’t know how she thinks.

Taking a straight approach and then magnificently failing, it’s not a laughing matter at all. Well, that’s no more than an excuse. In fact, it’s exactly how Utano-san said that I was incompetent. I know Aya’s feelings towards me. But, I’m still avoiding it.

If Aya doesn’t know what she seeks from me, then we simply have to

look for it together. She's still 18yrs old, she was just a 16 yrd old child when she developed those feelings. It's wrong to ask for an answer to such a thing from a child like her. But still, I did so. And I'm getting spoiled by her. Even though my answer.....had already appeared an year ago.

"She was crying after you fainted you know?"(utano)

"I see."

"To make a girl cry. You're the worst."

"I know."

When I shrugged my shoulders, she gave a sigh.

Am I the worst because I'm simply weak or because I still haven't accepted Aya? It's probably both. Yeah, I'm definitely incompetent. Taking a damage from a different person than the usual Ermenhilde, I hung my head in shame.

"And, I as well———"(utano)

"Hm?"

Her next words were in such a small voice that I couldn't hear it clearly.

I looked at her so that she could repeat it but she simply looked at me with the cold eyes of the great Witch.

"So I heard you rampaged in the forest of rotting souls?"(utano)

"No, I simply ran all over the place from monsters. It was Aya who dealt the finishing blow."

"What's that? That's completely different from what I heard."

Apparently she wasn't going to repeat what she had said before so I simply decided to answer her next question.

When I did, she laughed while hiding her mouth. That gesture was very womanly, in a completely different sense from Aya or Miss Francesca. She loses to both of them in the chest department but she's definitely an adult.

“It’s the truth though.”(renji)

“It may be to you but it seemed different to Aya though. Well, people do glorify every action of the person they like after all.”

“in the first place, Aya wasn’t even there though.”

I recalled that shitty skeleton. Aya wasn’t there but it was definitely Aya who killed it. The high output bombardment that she fired from underground had blown half of that demon away.

Seeing an attack like that really makes me realize how weak I really am once again. She’s intelligent, beautiful, and has a good personality as well. The only thing I surpass Aya in is age. What a pitiful thing it is.

“Then, all the more so. To this child, you are that special.”(utano)

“That’s troublesome in its own way though. I’m not a special person after all.”

While we talked in low voice so as to not wake AYa up, we looked at her sleeping face again.

“So, why am I here?”(renji)

“You don’t remember?”

“Unfortunately, I have no memories after fighting the demon in the forest.”

“My oh my. It seems you even missed Aya’s crying face.”

“To be honest I’m glad I didn’t see that though.”

If I saw something like that, I’ll be filled with a guilty conscience.

Crying faces are one thing—–I really don’t want to see. It’s fine if they are tears of happiness though. But if I don’t want to see tears of sadness……at all.

“I’m a crybaby as well after all. If I see someone crying, I’ll start to tear up as well.”(renji)

“That’s true.”

Enough of that, I averted my face to run from her gaze. Why is it that only at such times she shows a gentle expression? I really am not good with dealing with Utano-san. She's fun to talk to but I feel as if she can see through my inner thoughts sometimes.

"Yui carried you all the way here from the forest."(utano)

"Yui-chan did?"

I ended up asking again due to hearing a familiar name.

Yui-chan. Hiyuu Yui. One of the 13 summoned, the same as us. A girl that tames monsters. I didn't know where she was currently but was she luckily near the forest?

"She was actually in the Elfreim continent but apparently Koutarou-kun brought her here. He had seen a future where you would die it seems. You should be sure to thank both of them."(utano)

Where do I even start with this? I'm already surprised with Yui-chan and Koutarou's names coming up and now you're telling me that I was predicted to be dead?.....That bastard Koutarou, if he saw something like that, tell that to me directly!

Well, I'm also at fault since I was hiding where I was living I guess.

Why is it that everytime he sees me in a future, I'm about to die? Am I that weak? I do consider myself to be stronger than the normal adventurers of this world but is that also wrong? I really feel like crying now.

Seeing me like that, Utano-san started laughing again. Aya kept on sleeping as usual though.

"Yui-chan and Koutarou.....are you trying to gather everyone up in the capital?"(renji)

"Well, now. The event is close but I have no intention of doing that."

Saying that 'she' has no intention to do so means that someone else is planning to do so from the dark.

For example, the person who created this world, or maybe it's just some

absurd fate working. Well, that person is not a human but a goddess though. I hope that my intuition telling me that another problem is coming is really wrong. Everything that she brings up is in a different level of trouble. On top of that, it's always concerned with me somehow. Am I the only one who thinks that she's just messing around with me now?

As if she had read my thoughts, Utano-san also gave an amused smile.

"Work hard."(utano)

"I refuse. I worked hard enough for my whole life on that day an year ago."

"That's irrelevant. She's a goddess, and it's always your duty to take her requests."

What kind of logic is that?! That's messed up. I have to deal with that woman for my whole life?

Ignoring me who dropped his shoulders in dissapointment, Utano-san stood up.

"But certainly, it seems everyone is gathering together. It's as if some kind of fate is working at it."(utano)

"Oh please no. The Demon God is dead. The most troublesome thing is gone.....i just don't want anymore fighting."

"I agree. I have a lot of things I have to do in this country."

Her tone, was even deeper than before when she said those last words. She must be feeling depressed while thinking about all the work she has.

It doesn't show much on her expression usually but, only at times like these she's easy to understand.

".....you seem to be working hard as well, with all sorts of things."(renji)

"Yes, all thanks to a certain someone quickly disappearing out of nowhere."

I decided to ignore that and look at Aya's sleeping face instead.

I really do feel sorry about it. For running away from all the trouble, from Aya and for hiding myself my other comrades……and to have left everything to Utano-san.

But even then, Utano-san never seriously blamed me for anything and still talk to me like back then. I wonder if this woman knows how happy that makes me. Even though I'd be in no position to refute her no matter what she says to me.

"fufu, for the time being, first heal your wounds. It's safe here after all."(utano)

"Oh please, can't I at least move to an inn in the town instead?"

If I were to stay here, I'll start meeting all sorts of people that know me. How will I even face them after hiding from them for one whole year?

Even while knowing that, Utano-san's gaze was cold. Extremely cold—– an Absolute zero level gaze was sent towards me.

"That's impossible. Everyone already knows that you're here."(utano)

"—-Wha?!"

"Eru is the insurance. Without her, you won't slip out of the castle either. Am I right?"

I looked at Utano-san blackly.

And she looked at me with a smile of a child that just succeeded in her prank. Though it was rare expression from her, I could only feel chills from it.

"Utano-san, may I ask an abrupt question?"

"What is it, Yamada-kun?"

"I, how long was I……asleep I wonder?" (T/N: it's difficult in english but basically Renji is talking in a very polite manner to her.)

"Today would be the fifth day, so basically around 100 hours I guess?"

I covered my face with my left hand. No wonder my body feels so

sluggish. I must have been rushed to the capital but I didn't think I had been asleep for so long.

"Aya's here so what about them.....Feirona and the others?"(renji)

"I met them. A noble daughter, an elf, and a beast woman. You're once again travelling with very interesting people, eh?"

"So they were safe. That's good....."

That's a relief. I did think that they'd be safe considering Aya's here but even I would get worried seeing it's been 5 days already.

They're probably not in the castle so they must be in the town, resting in an inn. If I am able to slip out later, I should go meet them. Well, first I'll have to find which inn they're staying inn though.

"You can be relieved. I'll send a messenger by tomorrow and invite them to the castle later."(utano)

"Ah, I see."

She really can read minds, right? Or am I simply that easy to read? I hope it's the former.

"But even still, you've brought something troublesome again with you."(utano)

"Hm?"

From her pocket, she brought out a black crystal. I have no memory of this but I doubt its something good. Not to mention colour—it made me recall that goddamn fucking monster. Probably because I dreamt of the past just now, I felt even worse than before. From just the looks, it looks like a pretty crystal ore that hasn't been shaped yet.

"And what's that?"(renji)

"It's what the beast woman called Mururu brought from the Elfreim continent."

".....Mururu did?"

Or rather, so she's from the Elfreim continent. How did she manage to

get a ship needed to cross over to this continent? Especially how she didn't even know how money worked.

Well, I should ask that the next time we meet. I can't find an answer like this.

"Then, that's the content of the request from the Spirit God?"(renji)

"Oh my. You didn't know that?"

"Because she refused to show it to anyone but Utano-san. And I felt that it'd be better to open it with you as well."

Though in truth, I just wanted to avoid any responsibility. But let's not tell her that. Honesty may be a virtue but too much of honesty is just foolish.

"So, what is it?"(renji)

"A fragment of the Demon God's heart."

Ah, so that's why I felt so sick suddenly. Even after hearing that, I didn't feel disturbed in the slightest. In fact, I feel more satisfied. If Ermenhilde was with me, I would have smashed it to pieces. Utano-san said that she took Ermenhilde so that I don't run away but probably this was the main reason. To have thought so far, so annoying.

"Is the Demon God reviving?"(renji)

"No, we won't let it."

I recalled what that demon said back at the Magic CIty.

But Utano-san denied it strongly. It really encouraged me as well.

"That's the reason why we exist here, Yamada-kun."

Away from the window, she said that while sitting at the side of the bed. Her reddish black eyes looked at me from an even closer distance than before.

Too close, or am I the only one who is thinking that.

"Aya still hasn't woken up?"(renji)

Averting my gaze, I looked at Aya.

No matter how much we talked she showed no signs of waking up.

“Yes, I made her sleep with magic after all.”(utano)

“Wha——-”

‘What are you saying?’ Before I could say that, my lips were blocked. With soft lips of a woman’s.

It was just a peck, like a child’s kiss. That too, only lasted an instant before she moved away. But even then, it was sweet and smelled nice.

When I opened my eyes, that I had closed who knows when, my gaze met Utano-san’s slightly moist gaze. That also only lasted an instant. She quickly stood back up again and quickly moved towards the door. She must be embarrassed. Even though she’s usually assertive, in the end, her heart is still that of an innocent child’s. It seems that hasn’t changed either.

“Then, I’ll leave you take care of Aya, Yamada-kun.”

She snapped her fingers.

When she did, as if nothing had happened, Aya lifted up her sleepy body. Since she was sleeping on the table, she stretched her body while sitting with sleepy eyes.

“Good Morning, Aya.”(utano)

“Eh, ah—-Yuu.....”

At that, she finally realized that I was awake and her body hardened up. Her expression changed into various ones, one by one. I can never get bored of this no matter how many times I see it. Now if I were to say that I saw your sleeping face right now, I wonder what kind of face she’d make?

“I’ll go prepare a meal, you’re hungry right?”(utano)

And the woman who left only problems behind her left the room after saying just that.

Chapter 34 Reunion (1)

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"Renji-san, are you fine now?"(aya)

"Hm, yeah. My body hurts a bit due to sleeping too much though."

According to Utano-san, I slept for full 5 days. It's been a long time since I slept for so long continuously. I guess even I'll get tired after walking continuously till the Forest of Rotting souls and then fighting a Demon God's descendant. Well, I'm already very lucky to have survived all that to be honest.

"Also, I'm hungry."(renji)

"fufu. Even though you almost died, you're already energetic eh?"(aya)

"Cause I didn't die in the end."

When I said that, Aya laughed amusingly. Seeing her smile, I also started laughing with her.

"Did I make you worry?"(renji)

"Yes, very much so. Francesca-senpai and the others were very worried as well."

"I see."

Aya brought a chair and sat down near my bed. The way she sat was, in a sense, in an even more dignified manner than Utano-san. I won't say that out loud though. Even walls have ears after all.

Aya's tone was a bit angry, but her expression was so gentle that I didn't feel scared at all. I wonder if she herself knows that? I doubt she does.

"To fall asleep in my room, you really must have been worried a lot, I guess."(renji)

“.....mouu, please forget that.”

Blushing a little, she glared at me. Normally it would be scary but right now, it only feels cute. When I kept on staring at her face, she ended up averting her face.

“It would be such a waste to forget that.”(renji)

“There’s no such thing!”

When she spoke angrily and I shrugged my shoulders at it, my right arm pained again slightly. No, the wound has healed but, a little of the Demon God’s poison is still remaining probably.

“Are you really okay?”(aya)

“As long as Aya doesn’t shout at me, yeah.”

“uu..”

When I gave a stifled laughter, Aya curled up her body. It’s because you act like that, I feel like teasing you more you know? Due to the gap between this and the way she acts normally, well, my teasing nature gets awakened.

Even I myself think that its very childish of me to do so. Like, what the hell am I doing? But, oh well, I guess it would be imprudent to continue any further right now .

If I am to tease someone who was worried for me, I should at least wait till I’m back to full health again. Even I have tended to my injured comrades countless times. At those times, its best to always be energetic, I know.

“You’re always teasing me.”(aya)

“Because I get really amusing reactions when I do so.”

“Haah.....you’re treating me as a child.”

“Because you still are a child.”

“I’m already 18 yrs old.”

“And I’m 28.”

When I said that, she pouted like a child to protest against me. That's exactly why you're still a child. But if I pointed that out, she'll fix her expression which would be a waste so I didn't.

We continued conversing like that when,

"Oh right, where's Ermenhilde?"

".....Eru is probably with Yui or that idiot, I think."(aya)

When I changed the topic, she sighed.

Idiot—-probably means Koutarou. Aya and Koutarou don't get along much. Well, they don't hate each other or anything, they simply quarrel with each other too much. That's because Aya uses magic by using her mind/thinking with her head whereas Koutarou weaves/creates magic with pure sense/intuition. One being a genius and one who depends on pure instinct, they simply are unable to understand each others magic. That's why they end up quarrelling.

Even after countless times I have mediated their fights, they still haven't stopped.

"It was Koutarou who came to save me because he saw a future of me dying you know?"

"No such thing."

"When I tried to defend Koutarou, Aya pouted again.

"If he saw a future of Renji-san dying, he should have quickly told it to us. If he had, we would have taken Souichi and Yayoi with us as well."(aya)

"That won't do. Those two have their own things to do as well."

To be honest, if it were upto me, I'd have Aya live as a student at Magic City as well but it's useless to say that now.

"He's always putting up airs, over exaggerating things.....that's why I don't like him."(aya)

"Please try to get along with him more."

“I’ll try to.”

Well, even I think that he should have told me such a future earlier though. He saw my death after all, my death! I don’t want to die yet, you know? I have lots of things I want to do, things I have to finish. There’s no way I’ll accept dying in that remote forest.

I’m pretty sure he has already disappeared but next time I meet him, I’m definitely going to complain about this. Also, I have to thank him for saving me as well. That chunnibyou wannabe is weak to such things after all. I’m gonna tease him to my heart’s content.

“Oh right, is Yui-chan also in the capital?”(renji)

“Yes. She was the one who carried you here from the forest on her Fafnir. She should be at the training grounds right now.”

Saying that, Aya stood up and opened the curtains. I also came closer to the window and looked outside. The training grounds were perfectly visible from this window. There a giant crimson dragon was currently resting its wings. It was Yui-chan’s third contracted beast, the Ancient Dragon-Fafnir. Just like an year ago, it always looked strong and cool. Every man admires dragons after all, yeah. We had the dragon lend us its back to move quickly to different places and also had the help from its breath attacks during battles countless times.

“Oh, there’s Fafnir.....so that means..”

Saying till that, a 15cm tall humanoid with wings came towards the window we were looking through—a fairy. When I had asked sometime before if she didn’t feel cold flying around wearing just that white dress, apparently, the wind spirits took care of that for her. Truly convenient.

“__, ____-”

Since I closed the window, I can’t hear what she’s saying but it seems she hasn’t realized that so is still continuing to talk. When I finally laughed at her, she finally realized and started beating on the window. She’s the same as well it seems.

“Don’t break the glass, will you?”(renji)

“How rude. Even though I came here to greet you, you laughed at me.”(fairy)

“It’s your fault to start talking even though the window was closed. You should have realized that earlier.”

“uu––well, that’s true as well.––”

Since she’s mumbling in a small voice I can’t hear her properly. Since her body was small, her volume was low as well.

“What did you say?”(renji)

“Shut up. Idiot! Die with your incompetence!”

“I am not gonna die that easily.”

And what the hell, she’s calling me the same thing as Utano-san. Even I’ll get hurt a bit now. I’m not that incompetent, probably. Even like this, I still try to live as bravely as possible.

“Anastasia, did you see Ermenhilde?”(renji)

“Wha? What, you prefer that medal woman over me?”

“What is wrong with your brain? I can’t calm down without Ermenhilde by my side that’s all.”

But she still looked at me with a suspicious gaze. Really, what goes on inside her head?

Fairy Anastasia. She’s the queen of all fairies that reside in the forest of the World Tree in Elfreim. She’s a user of Spirit magic and in terms of usability of magic, she even surpasses Aya in my opinion. Though I wonder if that’s simply because she’s a fairy or because this nagging chibikko(small kid/brat) is actually skilled on her own.....It’s probably the former.

I wonder what she was thinking right now after I asked about Ermenhilde since the Fairy queen flew away from the window and glided in the air. She’s really skilful. I recalled that I had tried flying using spirit magic many times myself but I couldn’t fly as well as Anastasia. And then I was made a fool of as well. I’ll ask her again and take revenge this time.

“fuun. You have it hard as well, Aya.”(fairy)

“Not really. This fun in its own you know.(aya)

“Yuuko as well, without him knowing.....you’re such a sinful man, Renji”(fairy)

“In Utano-san’s case, I’m more of a victim in my opinion.”(renji)

“.....”

But, for some reason, I ended up getting a cold glare from Aya instead. Even the presence beside me became colder.

“What did you do to Yuuko-san?”(aya)

“Why am I being treated as the wrong-doer!?”

To be looked so suspiciously by Aya.....I’m so sad. But in truth, earlier, how should I call it, that was a surprise attack by her. In any case, I am not at fault in anyway I think. Or maybe I am at fault for not being clear even now?

Well, I guess its always the man who’s at fault in such cases. Yeah.

“It comes to him as a habit, doesn’t it?”(fairy)

“Shut up, chibikko.”

“nuu. You’re calling me like that again, you incompetent!.”

Saying that, she climbed on my right shoulder. The weight I felt made me nostalgic and I ended up smiling a little.

“Where’s Yui-chan?”(renji)

“With Faf’. ‘Knight’ is swinging swords with Yuuta.”(fairy)

“With Kuuki eh——-”

I’ll have to go meet him as well. Kuuki Yuuta. The [Knight of the Goddess], one of the heroes affiliated with the Knights Order of the country. And ‘Knight’ was the first contracted monster of Yui-chan, a Phantom Knight. He’s called ‘Knight’ because he’s a knight. Utano-san was the one who named him. Don’t try to think too much about it. It’s

useless to make a retort.

But still, I sure hear a lot of my comrades names just by coming to the capital. That made me feel——very weird kinds of unclear emotions, making me scratch my head.

“You’ll catch a cold so I’ll close the window again, okay?”(aya)

“Yeah.”

“My oh my. What devotion! You’ll definitely become a good wife, Aya.”(fairy)

“———!”

When Anastasia teased her like that, she silently, but instantly tried to grab the fairy. Aya really has a low boiling point in front of her comrades it seems.

It wasn’t her aim, but since Anastasia was on my shoulder, it ended up with her jumping at me. Normally I’d just hold her back easily but I really didn’t have any strength on me right now. I tried but my legs soon gave up as I fell. I also felt the actual culprit move away from my shoulder as well.

“Oh!”

“EH!?”

Just like that, I fell down along with Aya. I fell with my back towards the bed and Aya fell right in my arms. Depending on how you look, it would seem as if I was passionately hugging Aya I guess.

“Oho.”(fairy)

“Don’t tease her too much. Even after all the teasing, she still hasn’t gotten used to it after all.”(renji)

“I know.”(fairy)

Why was she giving me thumbs up, this idiot fairy queen.

“You okay?”(renji)

I called to the girl in my arms but I got no response. When I bent my

neck below to see her, only her glossy black hair came into my view. She must be putting a lot of time in grooming her hair. It even smelled really nice as well. But as you'd expect, I won't harbour wicked thoughts for a girl who feels more like a daughter.

"Aya?"(renji)

"....."

When I spoke, as gently as I could, she put her hand on my chest. She held my shirt, and gripped it very tightly.

As I wondered about what emotions were running through her——I looked above to see the culprit behind this situation, the fairy queen flying around the room grinning while looking at us. How can one be so carefree? As expected of prank-loving fairies I guess? And she's their queen to top it off.

Giving a sigh, I released strength from my body. After 5 days of only sleeping, I lack all energy.

"C'mon, don't cry. I'm still alive right?"(renji)

Her shoulders were slightly trembling.

But I could only caressed her head gently while combing through her hair. I was the one who made her worry and afraid. She said it lightly but she must have been really worried when I was unconscious. I can understand. I was also always anxious and worried whenever I was looking after an injured comrade. I know what she's feeling all too well.

And I also know that you alone cannot deal with those emotions. So all I could do was caress her head to calm her. Just like back then.....just like 'her' who held me tightly and caressed me.

"You're a crybaby as usual."(fairy)

"More than 50% is your fault here, you know?"(renji)

"I wonder?"

Saying that, as if she had read my mind, she looked at me. Well, I know. The one who's at fault the most is me who almost died. It's me who made

them all worry so much. That's why I could only try and comfort Aya. Even though I haven't done anything for this girl. Even though I haven't even answered back to her feelings. But even so, I end up accepting Aya like this. This, definitely is my fault. I know that.

After caressing her head for a little while, Aya's shoulders started to tremble lesser and lesser. Utano-san did say that 'take care of Aya' but, I guess, she expected even this to happen. While I was thinking of that, one of the culprits(Anastasia) hit my head. Since she's small it doesn't hurt but it did surprise me.

"That was a minus."(fairy)

"……What was?"*(renji)

"You shouldn't think of other women while embracing a girl!"

Can read minds as well? I ended up retorting like that.

"I wasn't really, though."(renji)

"Should I tell about this to Eru and Yuuko later then?"

"Fine, fine."

Maybe she didn't like my answer, she hit my head again. It was a fist this time. Well, that doesn't really hurt either though.

"Even though you abandoned us for a whole year; how about showing some gratitude towards me who let you off the hook with just this much?"(fairy)

"Yeah, yeah."

"……Seriously. you're such a tsundere."

"That usage is definitely, without a doubt, wrong!"

There's no 'tsun' in me. In the first place, a male tsundere just sounds creepy.

(T/N: If you don't know what a tsundere is, tho it's pretty much impossible if you're reading LNs and WNs and still don't know that, but even so if you don't, just google it. I'm pretty sure you'll get wiki pages

explaining in detail what a tsundere is :P)

"Ermenhilde also uses such weird words at times but who the hell is teaching you guys all this stuff?"(renji)

"Koutarou, obviously?"

That idiot, I'm definitely going to make him cry later. Though I do have to thank him for saving me, that's a different thing altogether.

Deciding that in my heart, I lifted Aya from her shoulders and sat down on the bed with her. It ended up with her technically sitting on my lap but Aya didn't seem to have any complaints about that. To be honest, I'd be happier if she'd move already. As usual, she rested her head on my chest. She smells temptingly nice, really.

"A....Aya?"(renji)

"What is it?"

It would seem that she had cried out completely already as her voice was back to normal. I gave a sigh of relief at that.

"Please get down off me already."(renji)

"It's amazing you could even say that. I'm actually impressed."(fairy)

I ignored the fairy speaking from above for now. Or rather, at least half of this is your fault, this situation.

But seriously, how did it end up like this? I ended up giving a wry smile. I was the one at fault. No matter how I try to gloss over it, the fact doesn't change that my weakness made them worry so much.

"I really made you worry, didn't I?"(renji)

"Very much so."(aya)

"I see."

The same conversation we just a while ago. But this time, Aya was crying. But for some reason, I don't feel that bad inside. There's no way I would when it was a beauty who was worried for me and crying over me.

I see. I whispered that once again and looked towards Anastasia.

“I made you worried as well?”(renji)

“Yes, very much. I was incredibly, worried for you.”

“As usual you exaggerate everything, don’t you?”

“As usual your treatment of me is different from others as well, isn’t it!?”

“This much is more than enough for you.”

As I talked with Anastasia, Aya, in my embrace, trembled her shoulders. But this time I didn’t hear her sobbing but heard her stiffled laughter.

“Thank you. For crying for me.”(renji)

“––Yes.”

From within my embrace, Aya smoothly slipped out. Even though she had been crying till now, she was surprisingly nimble with her feet.

In exchange, Anastasia came back to sit on my right shoulder.

“If Renji-san won’t cry, I’ll cry for you as well.”(aya)

“I see.”

“.....That’s why, if you even slightly think that that is not good, please don’t make me cry anymore.”

With reddened eyes, but with a smile, she said that to me.

“Was that a confession?”(fairy)

“Well, I wonder?”(renji)

“Something like that?”(aya)

As we both answered at the same time, all 3 of us started laughing.

Were both the correct answer? Or were they both wrong?

As we talked about things that I wasn’t sure even held any meaning, the door was knocked.

“I brought food, Yamada-kun.”

Utano-san came in. In both of her hands were trays with different food

arranged.

How the hell did she even knock the door then?

“Oh? Anastasia, you were here as well?”(yuuko)

“Yes! Yuuko, where’s my portion?”9fairy)

“I’ll share mine with you.”

“This why I love you, Yuuko!”

To get lured in by food, she sure is selfish. As expected of a fairy, I guess.

As my right shoulder became lighter, I gave a sigh. As my gaze connected with Aya’s, we both gave a smile.

“Did you have him spoil you well?”(yuuko)

“___”

Instantly, Aya’s face turned red. She hid her face but even she was red to nape of her neck and the tip of her ears.

As usual, she’s weak to unexpected things.

“Now then, let’s eat shall we?”(renji)

At times like these, it’s best to act as if I didn’t notice and wait for the storm to pass. I don’t think that’s a mistake either. Seeing me like that, Utano-san looked at me for a second and gave a sigh.

“Don’t you know? Every time you sigh, you let your happiness run away apparently.”(renji)

“It’s fine. I’ve already found/caught my happiness.”(utano)

So it seems.

Chapter 34 Reunion (2)

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After finishing the late lunch, having nothing else better to do, I simply leaned back on the chair doing nothing.

I stared at the ceiling but it's not like there was anything worth watching there either. Now then, what should I do next?

"Now then, I'll clear up the tableware and return in a moment, 'kay?"(utano)

I looked towards Utano-san who rose from her chair as she said that. She had her usual serious-looking face that I was well acquainted with.

"I could at least help with that....."(renji)

"Injured should just rest. Don't worry, I'll make you work enough to pay back for this later."

That sounds unpleasant on its own though. Any job from her sounds troublesome, or should I say, a total pain. As if she had read through my thoughts, Aya sitting beside me gave a short laugh.

"I have a bad feeling about this, really."(renji)

"How rude. Do you really think I'll give you a job solely to tease you, Yamada-kun?"(utano)

You would, definitely.....I wonder what would happen if I actually said that?

While thinking of that, I moved my gaze away from Utano-san. I felt like her gaze became even colder but let's just ignore that. I feel like I'll be dragged even further down if I pointed that out.

"Let me help as well."(aya)

As if trying to help me, Aya also stood up and began gathering the

plates on the tray. Utano-san's gaze moved towards Aya at that.

As I felt relieved inside my heart, Utano-san suddenly looked at me again. I panicked and ended up straightening up my back.

"Renji-san, please take a good rest now."(aya)

"Yeah———"

"I'll keep watch so its fine!"(fairy)

Just when I was about to reply to Aya, Anastasia gave a reply while standing near my ear. She had returned to my shoulder from Utano-san.

"……..heavy."(renji)

"Ahn?"

Even if you're a fairy, it's really weird for a girl to make such sounds. Near my ear, Anastasia spoke in a really low but cold voice. It's not like the first time I'm hearing her speak like this; she speaks like this when she gets a bit angry.

"Wow, Anastasia is going to stay with me, I'm so happy.."(renji)

"Good, good. Show your gratitude with tears in your eyes Renji."(fairy)

"Fufu."

Was it Aya or Utano-san who laughed at that? That said, Anastasia's mood still seemed to have not changed. Her voice is back to normal but she's probably still a bit angry. Or rather, she's definitely angry. As you'd expect of a woman—well, I doubt she's mentally grown enough to even be called a woman. I guess I shouldn't have said that about her weight. It was only a joke though. Well, that excuse won't work now though.

"Anastasia, you sure get along with Yamada-kun, don't you?"(utano)

"Of course. But don't worry, I don't whip injured people so I won't do anything like that."

"Wait, if I hadn't been injured were you going to whip me!?"(renji)

"That or, would have hung you down the window."

That's equally scary! That's inhumane. I'd die, you know?

"That aside, Utano-san.."(renji)

" Hoh? 'that aside'....?"(fairy)

"Utano-san, take this one with you, she's really starting to scare me."(renji)

"Don't worry. I'm not scary, not scary at all."

The way you're speaking as if trying to persuade a pet animal only makes it more scary stupid!

"You two really do get along."(utano)

"Eh, where? How?"(renji)

When I asked that, Utano-san simply gave a smile and Aya just gave a sigh. Anastasia simply silently pulled on my ear. It doesn't hurt but it does tickle so really, stop. As my body stirred, she started putting more strength in her hands grabbing my ear as if she was having fun with it.

"Don't start fighting and destroy the room, okay?"(aya)

"No need to worry. We won't imitate you and Koutarou."(renji)

".....you still remember that?"(aya)

Surprised for a second, Aya then hid her face in embarrassment.

Once, while on our journey, those two fought in an inn which led to a full out magic battle inside a room. I don't remember the reason behind their quarrel but I remember how troublesome it was to deal with it after wards. We had to pay so much just for the repairs.

But it sure was easy back then. The country would pay for all our expenses. Well, both me and Utano-san had to bow and apologise to the Knight commander O'brien who was travelling with us along with the Knight Order though. It can't be helped. It was totally our fault after all. Well, Aya and Koutarou's fault to be exact.

"How nostalgic. Also.....you sure remember everything concerning Aya eh Yamada-kun?"(utano)

“Yuuko-san!”(aya)

“No need to react that much. Don’t drop the plates you’re carrying, okay?”(utano)

“Uu.....uuu”

While talking like that, those two left the room.

“Ah, Yamada-kun?”(utano)

“Hm?”

“Come to my room at night. I’ll be waiting for you.”

Saying that at the very end, she left. Aya seemed surprised, or rather, was blushing madly. Well since it’s Utano-san we’re talking about, she’s probably just wants to talk about what we’ll do next. There’s the matter of the Demon God’s heart as well. I’m not very excited about this. I have already had my expectations destroyed countless times by her like this. Even I’d learn after failing so many times.

Aya though, I wonder what she imagined? I’m definitely gonna tease her about this later.

“What does she mean?”(fairy)

“Well, it’s adult talk, you don’t have to worry.”(renji)

“.....”

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With Anastasia still on my right shoulder, I left the room. I did try lying back down on my bed but ended up feeling way too bored. Since I had been sleeping for 5 days already, I didn’t feel like sleeping either. It didn’t feel right to keep on lying on my bed needlessly. So, I decided to leave the room for a walk. It’s necessary to move my dull body as well after all.

“just when I was finally free from Ermenhilde, now I have to deal with you eh.....”(renji)

“What’s up with that? Even though I’m keeping you company so that you don’t start feeling lonely.”(fairy)

“Yeah yeah. Thank you very much for that.”

“I don’t feel like you meant a single word of that though?”

“Oh I am very thankful, really, Anastasia-sama.”

Angrily, or rather sulkily, Anastasia turned her head away to the other side. Instead of the usual Ermenhilde, now I have Anastasia to talk to. Can I never get some alone time?

While thinking like that, I walked through the empty corridor. The brand new leather boots prepared for me made a dull sound as I walked. It was a bit chilly here but since the weather was nice, I’m sure my body will warm up as I walk.

Even though I was bedridden till just now, I have become able to walk just after one meal. The cheat abilities sure are something. Not just our physical abilities, even our restorative capacities are in a level above normal. Well, I’m still nowhere near the superhuman levels Souichi and others have either. If it were those guys, they’d probably be able to move around almost instantly after resting.

“You have a gorgeous fairy walking with you, you sure are a human living in extravagance aren’t you?”(fairy)

“You’re not supposed to say that yourself, you know?”

Well, true, Anastasia is definitely a beauty. With curly green hair and wings on her back. A fairy, that only existed in tales and legends in our world, existed here as if it was common sense. And for some reason also sitting on my shoulder. She’s only 15 cm tall but even then her beauty is incredible. Other women around me—like Aya or Utano-san were beautiful as well but Anastasia’s beauty was almost unrealistic. Her body even had curves and covered with the thin silky white dress, it’s safe to say that it was poison for any man’s eyes, even at her size. Even like this,

she's cute like a doll. Well, she's actually a fairy though. As expected, I wouldn't harbour weird thoughts for a fairy the size of a doll. I'm not far off gone yet, neither am I that thirsty. In fact, if I ever did end up looking at this pipsqueak in that way, I think I would have lost then. And somehow, Anastasia also understands my thoughts so she'd often tease me in that manner. Back then, Koutarou and other who were excited about getting summoned to another world were getting excited saying "It's a fantasy world!" when they met her but apparently in Anastasia's eyes, that reaction was an instant 'out'. Though in my opinion those kinds of guys would be more fun to tease like this though. But for some reason, she decided that I'll be the only one who'd have to deal with her teasing. I don't understand the basis behind it at all.

She'd also get into a lot of fights with Ermenhilde as well. I guess it's that, 'the more they fight, the closer they are', or something like that.

"If only your personality wasn't like that.."(renjii)

"Oh? What does that mean I wonder?"

"Who knows indeed.."

But still, how come I haven't seen any other people even though its still bright outside? It felt as if we were the only people in the astle.

"Where are you heading?"(fairy)

"Nowhere particular."

I left only because I was bored inside my room. It's not like I had decided on a destination when I left.

And for some reason, Anastasia, Aya and Utano-san, not a single one of them would tell me where Ermenhilde was.

Even I won't try running away after all this time.....probably. I'm a bit worried for Feirona and the others as well. I want to go and meet them.

"Haah.....then let's head to the training ground maybe? Yui and others should be there right now."(fairy)

"I see."

Anastasia said that as if fed up. Well, since I really didn't have anywhere I had to go, I turned to move towards the training grounds. 3 years ago, though not for long, but I did live here. I remember the way. Taking a right, I went down the staircase where I met a few of the soldiers on guard duty. I finally met people inside the castle but even when I greet them they'd simply salute. They sure have been trained well. I ended up admiring them. Though it'd be nice if they'd just greet back when I do so. I am just an adventurer now.

I may have been summoned as a Hero back then but the reason why I was summoned has been completed. For someone like me who can only fight at his fullest against the Demon God, I don't think I have much value left now. But even then, the gazes of the soldiers I passed through were as if they were seeing something sacred, filled with zeal and passion. In my old world, I would never get something like this I ended up feeling confused as to how I should act.

She must have felt something about this as Anastasia began to poke my cheek as soon as we were out of the soldiers vision.

"Why the hell are you getting all nervous for?"(fairy)

"I'm not really getting nervous to be honest."

If I were to choose, what I felt was more closer to guilt rather than nervousness. During the journey, I was of use only at the very end. And that power as well was achieved at the cost of countless sacrifices. But the Demon God is no more. And his descendants can be defeated even without my help. And when even those would have disappeared———my cheat will become completely useless. A GodSlaying weapon is useful only till there is a god that needs to be killed.

What worth does a human like that even have. Without that, I am nothing more than an adventurer and Ermenhilde is nothing more than a talking medal. Well, that's rare in its own way though.

.....And to be honest, I have no problem with that but what does Ermenhilde think about that? Will it still ask me to treat it as a weapon? Or..... I want Ermenhilde to find a path where it isn't a weapon anymore.

That's why I wanted to show the world to Ermenhilde to open up its choices.—–I want to find that path together. That is the reason behind my journey. Even I think that it's a really immature objective though. Well, I think Utano-san might have realized that already though. Her intuition is way too sharp.

"What happened, sighing like that. Is there a problem?"(fairy)

"Just felt a bit ashamed.."

"Haah?"

When I said that, Anastasia made a surprised sound.

To them, I may be a hero who saved the world. But I chose Ermenhilde over the world. Rather than supporting the whole world, I ended up deciding to chose to support just my partner. I don't even have the resolve of a hero, and not to mention that I have to put others in danger just to fight properly. There's no way you can call that a hero. That's why—-those gazes, from soldiers whose names I don't even know, felt heavy.

"This is the castle of humans and you are the hero of those humans. Act more confidently.....you're so not cool at times."(fairy)

"I feel like I'm never able to act cool though?"

I have not been living a life where I could be called 'cool'. I'm just desperate. And was able to luckily survive till the end, that's all.

Anastasia seems to understand that as well as she poked my cheek while smiling. Her tiny finger felt a bit ticklish and I stiffened my face at that. My reaction must have felt amusing as Anastasia started laughing in a small voice.

"Well, that's true as well I guess."(fairy)

"Aren't you supposed to refute me there?"(renji)

"You want me to refute you when you yourself said that first?"

"Yeah."

"I really don't get you."

While we were talking, some well dressed nobles appeared to pass by in front of us.

As I let them go first, they looked at me confusedly.

Well, I guess they can't help it either. I'm dressed in nothing more than a nice tunic and trousers. That's not how normal people dress when inside the royal castle. The soldiers may remember me since I frequently went to the training ground 3 years ago but I doubt the nobles would. Not to mention I never returned here after the Demon God was subjugated. So I never had a chance to meet these nobles face to face like my other comrades. I hate things like banquets and parties so even in those I'd simply stand near some wall. There'd be very few nobles who'd remember me.

They must have found it even weirder that such a human had the fairy queen Anastasia, contracted to the Hero Hiyuu Yui, on his shoulders. They must have decided that it must be one of Anastasia's whims since they didn't ask me anything.

"Normally, they should be the ones to let us pass first you know?"(fairy)

"Not really."

I don't really understand how administration of land etc works, but I know that its these nobles who are running the country. They are much more useful than me, who only knows how to swing his sword, now that world is free of the Demon God.

"You're such a....Why do you always put yourself below everyone else?"(fairy)

As I walked towards the training ground, Anastasia said that to me. Whether it be her or Ermenhilde, why does everyone say the same thing to me? Compared to Souichi or the others, my achievements and abilities are both way below them.

"That's just my nature."(renji)

"That's not a 'nature' it's a disease.....Fix it, it's not cool."

She said that not in her usual playful voice but in a more serious—truly like the queen of fairies.

“I am fine the way I am. I find even my current status to be more than what I deserve to be honest.”(renji)

“You may say that modesty is a virtue but from my point of view, excess modesty is simply being servile. It’s unsightly. It doesn’t suit you Yamada Renji.”

“…….You say the same things as Ermenhilde.”

“No way!?!”

Her queen like pressure instantly dissipated. How flimsy is your character. While getting amazed by that, I sighed. How should I say this..

“You haven’t changed at all.”(renji)

“Renji, you have become more depraved though. Back then, you were more energetic.”(fairy)

“Well, I’ve lost my objective for coming to this world after all. It’s obvious I’ll become lazy.”

The Demon God had to be taken down urgently. As long as that thing was alive, lives were being taken. We couldn’t forgive that which is why we went and killed it in a matter of 2 years. Putting our lives on the line, after making countless sacrifices, gaining the trust of many, and to stand up to the expectations of the whole world.

Once again, I passed a few soldiers. This time, they went and bowed to me……Really, just stop. I really don’t like being in such a position. As if she read through my mind, Anastasia gave a sigh.

“The world’s finally heading to peace, I’d say I’m allowed to live leisurely aren’t I?”(renji)

“Well, I think the same way. After all, we are travelling all around the world on Fafnir. Yui has become quite able to talk with people on her own, you know?”

“Oh, that’s great. Back then she’d always hide behind mine or Kuuki’s

back after all."

"Seriously. Our master sure is a timid person."

I find that as one her good points though. As a man, you'd end up wanting to protect her no matter what when she acts like that. How should I say it, she's like a small animal. That's what Yui-chan is like. Has a small voice, even her height––well she was the youngest of us all so I guess that couldn't be helped.

As I was reminiscing about the past, Anastasia, this time, pinched my cheek. Still really didn't hurt though.

"Like I said, don't think about other women even when you're with a beauty like me."

"Other women, you say.....she's your master, you know."

"Even then! You really don't understand a woman's heart Renji."

"Well, I am man after all."

"That's where you're wrong. Even without understanding them, worrying and paying attention to a woman is what makes a good man, Renji."

That sure sounds difficult. As I shrugged my shoulders, my cheek was pinched again. If I treated her like a woman, I'll only get teased for it so I don't want to do it.....I guess that's just me being rude though.

It seemed that she also understood my thoughts since she didn't actually get angry. She was actually smiling, in fact. Really, how does a woman's heart even work? I really won't understand them till the end of my life.

"Is that how it works?"(renji)

"That's how it works indeed."

How many times have I gone through this kind of conversation? Though my partner would change from Utano-san, Aya and now Anastasia. Basically, I'm being told to understand a woman's heart more it seems. Even though I am actually trying to get better at that you know.

There was only one who told me that it wasn't necessary to understand her womanly heart. Thinking till that, I shook my head. At the same time, my head was hit by Anastasia again.

"Sorry."(renji)

"Since you apologised in advance, I'll forgive you this time."(fairy)

"Why thank you."

"Be grateful, okay?"

"Oh I am grateful indeed, Anastasia-sama."

When spoke jokingly, she hit my head again. After walking for a while, I finally reached the entrance to the training ground. On both sides of the corridor were iron swords, spears, axes, and shields, leaning against the walls. As I looked at the nostalgic view, I felt unspeakably calm inside.

This is it. The place where I started. The place where I, who had a weak cheat, first gained the power to actually fight. The place I learned the way of using weapons.

For some reason, my heart began beating loudly. I was slightly, excited inside. I myself had not realized that my footsteps had gotten lighter as I crossed the gate.

"He's a man, after all."

Anastasia said something in a small voice but I ignored it and entered the training ground as every soldier's gaze concentrated towards me. That was, nostalgic as well. I also noticed some faces I recognised.

The square shaped ground was huge; even with a few hundred soldiers training at the same time, there was still space left.

Right now, at the centre of this ground was a deep crimson dragon resting while coiled up. The sunshine must have felt nice to it as it didn't seem to move and seemed to be sleeping. Though I doubt it's actually asleep. It's very sensitive to the presence of others after all. Though it remained with its eyes closed even when I entered the ground.

As I looked at the surroundings, my gaze met with few soldiers again.

This time, they waved their hands at me with a happy smile. To me, that reaction is many times better than the admiring gazes I'd get.

While greeting them with a slight bow, I walked towards the familiar deep crimson body—towards Fafnir. The surroundings seemed to become noisy but I didn't pay them any mind.

Becoming aware of my presence, it felt as if the dragon slightly stirred.

"It's been a long time, fool."

"Wow, that hurt."(renji)

My face cramped at its very first words. Well true, I am in fact a fool. A fool that chose Ermenhilde over the world, over my comrades. But still, that's not how you should start a conversation you know?

It opened its eyes and its golden eyes pierced through me. Its body was over 30m in size, even its head alone was bigger than me. Its head suddenly closed in on me and its breath made my hair sway. Its pressure alone made my body freeze.

"You've changed."

"Hm?"

I took a step back. I may not have spent much time with it as a comrade but I am well aware of its personality. It's not really angry, neither is it amused. In the first place, it wouldn't really care about the actions of a single human. The reason I took a step back was because its head was too close to me and its every breath was almost painful. Anastasia was almost blown away by it. She hugged my face tightly but that's making me feel all sorts of softness so really, just stop.

It's single word resounded through my body like thunder. This is a dragon. An existence that could be called one of the strongest beings in this world. It's single breath could burn away the land and could break through the atmosphere with its wings. It's claws were sharper than steel and a single swing from its tail could turn even an Ogre to meat paste. It was an existence that could be considered abnormal even by cheat users like us. This was Fafnir. The strongest Dragon King.

By the way, though, the reason he became our comrade—became contracted to Yui-chan was absolutely stupid.

A spear had stabbed into the sole of its foot and it couldn't take it out by itself. As it was rampaging around in pain, we defeated it and Yui-chan who learnt the reason behind its rampage took out the spear and saved it. Truly, absolutely, stupid reason.

Well, though the reason was stupid indeed, we almost died while facing the rampaging Fafnir. I still have a bit of trauma from that. Souichi, Masaki-chan, Aya, Kuuki; every fighting specialised member fought against it and they could barely succeeded in just bringing the flying dragon down to the ground.

"You've lost your ambition. You've grown cowardly, God Slayer."(faf)

"It can't be helped. I did something incredible as killing a God even though I'm just a human. It's normal that I've lost all my energy after that."

Though I wonder if I ever had something as grand as some ambition in me.

"You killed it with pure hatred. No maybe that's why you've grown cowardly now."(faf)

"……coward, coward. You really don't hold back, do you?"

"But of course. You're completely different from what you were an year ago."(fairy)

"After all you've changed from the man that this little insect fell in love with."(faf)

"Who are you calling an insect?!?"(fairy)

Wait, that's what you're angry about?

"Eh, what? Did you perhaps like me or something?"(renji)

"Don't get conceited, you incompetent fool!!"(fairy)

"Wow, that really hurts you know.."(renji)

Even though it was Fafnir who said that, why am I the one getting scolded? Not to mention, she's angrier than when I joked about her weight.

"Just when I thought it had gotten quieter, it's become noisy again."

When I said that, Fafnir closed its eyes again. As it lay its neck back to the ground, it felt as if the ground slightly trembled. That's how much pressure this dragon gives off. Its every small action makes one nervous. Is this the disposition of a King? As expected of an existence that is considered superior by even the Demon King, who rules over all the monsters

"Yui was worried about you. Don't make her worry too much, GodSlayer. She's a crybaby after all.....when she cries, she's more troublesome than that insect over there."(faf)

"I don't really mean to do that."(renji)

I definitely do not enjoy making women cry. When I said that, I felt as if the pressure from the dragon in front of me lessened a bit. It talks harshly but worries about Yui-chan the most. I could feel a connection between them not just that of a monster tamer and dragon but something more. Even Anastasia, who was being noisy, went silent when Yui-chan's name came up. There as well, like Fafnir—-I could sense a bond and emotions. As my cheeks loosened in a smile, Fafnir opened its eyes again.

"What?"(faf)

"You've changed as well."(renji)

"—-Mu."(faf)

"It's being tsundere, I tell you. It tries to act cold and aloof but was also worried about you Renji."(fairy)

"That word does not suit at all so please stop, Anastasia."(renji)

Don't say things like 'Tsundere' while in a fantasy world. Think about my dreams and hopes.

"What does that word even mean? I do not understand the word but it

feels very unpleasant."(faf)

"If you've got a complaint, take it Koutarou. I plan to as well."(renji)

"Seriously……that brat is troublesome as well. Teaching weird words to this already noisy girl."(faf)

But still, I looked around. There are soldiers who are looking at us curiously but the people I'm looking for aren't here.

Yui-chan, Kuuki, and Knight. Where are they?

Well, Kuuki must be busy with work most probably.

"Where's Yui-chan?"(renji)

"Went to look for you and that insect. Knight went with her."(faf)

"Huh, we didn't meet them though?"(fairy)

"Like I care. You must have missed each other."(faf)

Well, that's too bad. I should have lazed around in my room a bit more. Yup, let's laze around in my room when I return.

I've been working too hard recently anyway, I should relax more it seems.

"That aside, Fafnir.."(renji)

"Hm?"

"Know where Ermenhilde is?"

"I don't."

Instant denial. Try to chose your words better can you? When the conversation's cut like that, I can't keep on talking now can I?

"Who cares about that medal woman?"(fairy)

"That won't do. She gets lonely pretty easily you know."(renji)

"……"

"Could you stop pulling my hair so silently. Please."

What if I go bald? This idiot.

But still, where have these guys kept Ermenhilde? She isn't of much use to others. Not to mention that she talks a lot.

Let's look for Kuuki now. I turned away from Fafnir and began walking.

I don't want to meet Commander O'brien even by a mistake though. That guy thinks with his muscles so if he found me who ran away to the villages, it'll end up being a physical talk instead. That alone, I really want to avoid. I'm still recovering. Well, I'd avoid him even if I wasn't.

"Renji."

While I was thinking of that, the Dragon King called me. By name, like back then. Happy of not getting called by that incredibly embarrassing title, I turned around as its golden eyes pierced through me again.

"What were you doing, for the past one year?"(faf)

"Travelling.....with Ermenhilde?"

It couldn't be helped that it ended up seeming like a question. I was just lazing around in villages after all.

"No."(faf)

But, as if not satisfied with my answer, the Dragon King looked down on me with strong eyes. His thunderous voice captured me. And his strong willed eyes saw through me. That one word alone, as if it held power, made my body tihten.

Yeah certainly, this is an existence far surpassing human kind. My weakness, pain, wounds, without minding any of those, it overpowered me.

"Why, do you obsess over Ermenhilde so much?"(faf)

"Because she's my partner. And, I promised her.....that once we had peace, we'll see the world together."

(T/N: I'm going to use female pronouns for Ermenhilde from hereon as everyone else clearly refers to ermenhhilde as a woman. Though its interesting to note that in japanese, Renji himself has never used female pronoun for her. He always uses partner, gender neutral words or simply

uses her name.)

That's right. I promised her. My precious promise—-as precious as my own life. The gold coloured.....

"That's not it Yamada Renji."

Anastasia stood up from my shoulder and pulled on my clothes. She seems to be saying something but I couldn't hear her.

I couldn't move away from Fafnir's eyes. Rather than saying that I couldn't move my eyes away, it felt as if I would have lost if I did avert my eyes.

"That promise was made with Eru, not Ermenhilde."(faf)

"Yeah, that's right. That's why I'll fulfil that promise."

When I declared that—-

"I see."(faf)

Saying just that, it closed its eyes.

Released from the golden eyes, I breathed a sigh. For some reason, Anastasia was sighing as well. Normally, they'd talk lightly but as expected, there are levels of difference between a Dragon and a Fairy. Even I could only whisper to myself that it really was a dragon that went all out even against his comrades.

"Let's go. Let's look for Kuuki next."(renji)

"Ye—yeah. Let's do that. Since Yui is looking for us as well, we'll meet sooner or later."(fairy)

"Well then, see ya later, Fafnir."(renji)

"Yes. Next time, I want to meet the not-cowardly you, Renji."(faf)

"I'll try to live up to your expectations."

Saying that, I shrugged my shoulders. But Fafnir wasn't even looking at me.

Chapter 36 Reunion (2)

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Chapter 37 Reunion (2)

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Chapter 34 Reunion (2)

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Credits

Translation by : Shikkaku Translations

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ウメ種
イラスト●柴乃櫂人
神殺しの英雄と七つの誓約
Kamigoroshinoeiyu and Ermenhilde
エルメンヒルデ
OVERLAP